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NOTHING VENTURE,

NOTHING HAVE.

A Novel.

BY ANNE BEALE,

AUTHOR OF "GLADYS THE REAPER," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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CHAPTER I.

KERN IN CLOVER.

KERN had been in London nearly a twelvemonth when Kezia wrote, in the name of her father, a very pressing letter for her return. Although Mr. Lyons was proud of the attention shown to his favourite daughter, he did not like to be so long separated from her, and said that, even if she were to return again to London, she must come back soon. The following reply came to Kezia's letter :—

"Great George Street,
"May 2nd, 18—,

"MY DEAR KEZIA,

"I am much obliged for your kind letter, and glad that you all wish to see me back again.

Tell my father, with my love, that I must beg for a few weeks more, as the London season is just beginning, and uncle has promised to take me to the picture galleries, the Opera, concerts, and other places, for my further improvement. I am sure Miss Eagles will agree with me in saying that after having had masters for music, singing, painting, and languages, it would be a pity not to avail myself of these further advantages. If uncle had not decided upon educating Luke for the medical profession, I believe he and aunt would fairly adopt me; but girls have always to yield to boys. I hope mother will not be too much overcome at parting from Luke. Tell her she will have my valuable services instead of his! I am thankful that there is a little family pride left amongst us, and that the boys have some wish to rise above mediocrity. Father must be pleased if mother is not. Lyons is a good old name. I wish Lachlan were a little more gentlemanlike. I do not exactly mean that he is not a gentleman in himself, but he is so *gauche*. You understand French enough to know what that means. He does not come here often, but when he does, he appears in such commonplace, ill-made clothes, and takes so little

pains with his manners, that I cannot help feeling ashamed of him though he is very clever, and really very good-looking. But he is such a gigantic young man! I believe that railway work makes men grow enormously. It is not only height but breadth, and of course, at his age, he ought to know how to manage his carriage, and, as the boys used to say, get his hair cut. When I entreat him to do so, he says I may cut it at once right off to my taste if I will, but that he is not acquainted with a hairdresser. Then he is so rude to Ensign Love; who, by the way, is very attentive to me.

"But uncle and aunt quite delight in Lachlan, and I know they have offered to lend him money, but he will not have it. Uncle called on Mr. Markman, who has been here several times, and is a charming man, and he says Lachlan is something super-excellent.

"Now I must tell you of a new feather in my cap. Sir John Nux has returned from abroad somewhat sooner than he intended. His mother accompanied him, and they are now in London. She is a great invalid, though she looks well enough, but she fancies herself ill, and that is nearly as bad as being ill; so uncle says, at least.

Sir John recommended his mother to consult uncle, and he has been in attendance ever since they arrived in England.

"One day they called here, and Sir John introduced Lady Nux to aunt and me. Sir John named me as Miss Dove, but uncle, who was in the room, said that my name was Lyons, and that I was his niece and not his daughter.

"'Surely you know, Sir John,' added he, to my utter chagrin, 'that she is the daughter of Mr. Job Lyons of the old Manor at Yeo?'

"Sir John looked astonished, and declared his ignorance of the fact. I felt myself blush up to my eyes.

"Lady Nux looked inquiringly at Sir John, not having heard distinctly what my uncle meant.

"'Strange coincidence, mother,' he said; 'Miss Lyons is a branch of the old family from whom my grandfather's grandfather, or some such person, bought the Downs property.'

"Lady Nux smiled and bowed, and said 'strange,' and there it ended.

"She is charming, and not at all proud. She has a foreign manner and appearance, from having lived so long abroad, that is quite captivating.

She took to me at once. That very day she and Sir John drove me with them to Hyde Park, and the next they took me to Drury Lane Theatre. Pray let the Loves know this! The Ensign looked fiercely at Sir John, who nodded at him.

"Since this first introduction I have been to all sorts of places with Lady Nux. I have danced with lords and baronets, and officers without number. I find no difficulty whatever in talking to these aristocrats. It is only to get up the gossip of the theatres, picture galleries, and peerage, and you are as much at home with them, as you are with the boors of Yeo—excuse the term—when you know who is engaged to who, and what is the price of wheat.

"Uncle is constantly telling me that I am in a false position, but aunt likes it just as well as I do, and is pleased at the notice Lady Nux takes of me.

"Sir John told me he had left Mr. Oliver Bat in Italy in full hue and cry after pictures and painters. He could not tear him away from the picture galleries. I did not know his taste lay that way. I thought he was simply a book-worm.

"As I am just going to have a singing lesson

from Signor Belli—oh! such a handsome man, with the most delightful Italian-English accent—I will conclude, with our united love to all, and remain,

"Your affectionate sister,

"KERN LYONS."

This letter created a great sensation at Yeo. Mr. and Mrs. Lyons were pleased at the elevation of their handsome daughter, Mr. and Mrs. Bull were sorely vexed, and the younger branches were somewhat jealous.

But the village was in a flame! Mrs. Lyons took care to make it generally known that her daughter was "always with Sir John and Lady Nux," and the spark gathered.

"Of course they don't know who she is," said Miss Daw.

"Of course not," said Miss Ann.

"But I don't wonder, sister," said Miss Harriet; "the girl is so beautiful and accomplished, and you know the Lyonses are superior."

"Fiddlesticks!" said both. "Generations ago! The other day it was that Lachlan boy, and now it is this Kern."

"And I'm sure I see nothing in her, do you,

Aunt Ann, but conceit and folly, Aunt Margaret? There's Margaret Anne, quite as accomplished, I'm sure, and much more ladylike, but then she has not been introduced to Lady Nux; and I'm sure Sir John admired her, for I saw him look at her several times, and I told her not to be so free with Mr. Perch and Captain Fin, because they might presume upon it, and then if Sir John proposed, you know aunts, it would never do. I'm just going to look in upon Mrs. Lyons about some butter, and I shall find out everything."

When Mrs. Love saw Mrs. Lyons, she was not greatly comforted. Mrs. Lyons forgot her complaints and the ten children, and the poor times, in Kern's grandeur.

"You see, Mrs. Love, it is as if the old times of my husband's family had come back, for Kern goes everywhere with Lady Nux, and dances with lords and ladies, and dukes and earls, and princes almost every night. And *your* young relation, Mrs. Love, Lachlan—who ought to be the baronet, as you know, (there, do be quiet Jacob, pulling so)—as I was saying Mrs. Love, Lachlan is getting on."

"I do not consider him as my relation, Mrs. Lyons. I just called upon you about some butter.

I hope your daughter Kern will not forget how to make butter and cheese, Mrs. Lyons; as the Captain was saying the other day, better to be sticking to the dairy, than dancing in London!"

"Oh! ma'am, my sister and the doctor are quite able to keep her from farm work if they choose. Kern says that she sees your son, Mr. Robert, very often, and that he's much improved."

And in this wise went on the comments on Kern's communications—but as I must copy another private letter from Lachlan to Miss Eagles, which arrived about a month after Kern's, I will not further detail them.

"Great George Street,
"July 6th, 18—.

"My dear Miss Eagles,

"The publishers tell me that your book will not be brought out until the autumn, which is a good season for novels, as people go to the sea-side, and want light literature to amuse them after London! Poor things! If I may judge from Cousin Kern, I should rather think they would want something heavy to keep their heads on their shoulders. Hers is nearly off. And no wonder! Lady Nux is spoiling her; Sir John and

a dozen other fine gentlemen are worshipping her; and her uncle and aunt are so proud of her, that they think no sacrifice too great to make for her.

"But I must return to the subject of my letter. I feel very much like an author myself. When the proofs come for revision—they appear slowly, fortunately for me, as they always keep me two or three hours out of my bed—I am so afraid of leaving an error, that I go over them, and over again, until I think I know the book, thus far, by heart. And a very clever book it is. Where did you get all that humour and pathos? I should not have fancied you possessed either, from your general manner.

"I have not been unmindful of your other commission. I have spent every hour of holiday that Mr. Markman has given me, in the different picture galleries, but all that I have been able to discover is, that I have in me a very great love for fine pictures. When I am a rich man—which I mean to be one of these days—I shall have a picture gallery as well as a museum.

"There is not, amongst the whole list of painters, one of the name of Eagles—nor one whose initials, or motto, could give one the least clue to such a name. I have bought catalogues and

carried them home, and studied them; but all in vain.

"Mr. Markman pays me a regular clerk's salary, as he is kind enough to say I earn it, and do not need the teaching that an articled clerk would require.

"Yesterday I went to the Royal Academy, and there I met Mr. Oliver Bat. He was with a gentleman who was pointing out some of the pictures to him. Mr. Oliver did not know me, but I was determined to make myself known to him. I addressed him accordingly, and he shook hands very kindly with me. I thanked him for the money he had sent me, and told him, in answer to his questions, my past and present history. He seemed glad that the present was so promising, and asked me to call upon him.

"Whilst I was talking to him, I could not help noticing the gentleman with whom he was. If it had not been rude, I think I should have asked him if he were not the very Mr. Eagles for whom I was seeking, his eyes were so much like yours. There was an expression in them that reminded me at once of you. He certainly was one of the most remarkable looking men I ever saw in my life.

"However, he and Mr. Bat passed on, and as my hour was expired, I left the Academy, and saw him no more.

"Mr. Oliver Bat told me that he should soon be returning into Dorsetshire, and would take down anything for me that I might have to send. How I wish we could get the book ready to send by him.

"I hope Mr. Eagles is well, and that Madam and Miss Rambully are also well.

"I have been attending some lectures that have made me heartily ashamed of my own poor attempts.

"Believe me,

"Dear Miss Eagles,

"Very truly yours,

"LACHLAN LYONS."

"P.S.—I forgot to say that your book is already widely advertised for September."

CHAPTER II.

NEWS FROM ABROAD.

EXPECTATION is a slow plodding of the brain. Time lags like a stage-waggon, and the mind grows as stolid as its four horses. To sit still and do nothing when some great event is coming by-and-by—you know not when—is to be like the solitary, sleepy traveller within the said waggon, wearily expecting London.

But stage-waggons, like stage coaches, are extinct; and people do not even sit still and wait now-a-days, as they did when Ellen Eagles waited for her book. So much depended on her book! "*Il y va de ma vie;*" she muttered to herself many times in the day, "and my life must go, if it does not clear up my difficulties."

She began to find that there is nothing so hard to bear as the weight of a secret. She, who was

naturally so straightforward, found great difficulty in managing the numerous little subterfuges she was obliged to have recourse to. But, hardest of all, was the endurance of her father's anxious looks and troubled questions. She saw that he had heard something about her that vexed him, and had not courage to speak to her about it.

"Ellen, my darling,"—he began one afternoon, and paused.

They were sitting together in the little green and white parlour. The autumn sun was looking in upon them through the red leaves of the Virginian creeper, and across the heads of the monthly roses. It was Saturday, and therefore they were at leisure. Desks, books, and papers were before them, but they neither wrote nor read.

Both father and daughter looked ill and unhappy. The cheerfulness that used to reign between them was gone, and had left a dull silence in its place. They looked years older than they had done even a twelvemonth before, and thin threads of silver-white hair were visible in Ellen's jet-black locks.

Her father seemed to have caught sight of these, when he said—

"Ellen, my darling——" and paused.

"Yes, father?" said Ellen, looking up.

"Tell me, my heart's-ease, my love, what is the matter with you? I can bear this uncertainty no longer."

"Nothing, dear father," said Ellen, trying to smile and to look firm.

"Ellen! I may have taught you and your brother many things amiss, but I never taught you to lie."

Mr. Eagles spoke with severity, and a tear sprang into his daughter's eye. His voice softened instantly.

"Ellen! my child! my only earthly comfort! Why keep secret from your father what pains you, and wears you down? Is it that you cannot bear the contempt and neglect of these people of Yeo—you, who are so much their superior? Think of all the noble minds that have quailed beneath misapprehension, and rise above it. Or is it that we cannot"—here Mr. Eagles' voice shook—"cannot find the son and brother that we have loved so madly and blindly? It is time that we break the ice and speak of him. I know that you have been trying to discover him, secretly, as I have been trying, for years, but in vain. Or

is it that you—Ellen, darling, forgive me if I probe a wound—is it that you love one who palpably neglects us? Only tell me what you suffer, that I may suffer with you, and so by sharing ease you of the burden of this secret trouble."

Ellen bowed her head on her hands, and wept. Tears flowed down the furrowed cheeks of her father, but there was anger in his piercing eyes.

"I have guessed aright, my child, and the friendship of years has grown into something stronger on your part, whilst on his—cold, cynical, heartless——"

"Hush, father—you mistake," muttered Ellen.

Mr. Eagles rose, and putting his arms round his child, and pressing his lips on her hair, entreated her again to tell him all.

"Give me a few weeks longer, dear father," sobbed Ellen, "and I will tell you—this—this—my secret."

"Ellen, poverty is harmless—pain is endurable—harass of mind is bearable—labour is sweet—so long as there is no secret between father and daughter. A few weeks more may kill you or me. You are pale, and thin, and wasting away:

I have lost my pleasure in life in seeing you thus; do not delay."

Ellen roused herself.

"Believe me that there is nothing wrong beneath my innocent secret, father, and that it will end in setting us right with the world, and ourselves."

There was a quick knock at the front door and a tap at the parlour door, followed instantly by Mr. Oliver Bat.

He drew back intuitively, when he saw that Ellen was in tears, and her father trying to console her. The anonymous correspondent was in his mind in a moment.

But Ellen mastered the tears, the surprise, the joy, and rising, greeted her friend with a flushed cheek and trembling hand.

Mr. Oliver held the hand a few seconds, and then turned to Mr. Eagles, who received him coldly.

"I have brought a parcel from London for you, Miss Ellen," he said, "from young Lachlan Lyons. It is so heavy, that my groom is bringing it from the Lodge."

"Thank you, Mr. Oliver," said Ellen, her countenance brightening with sudden animation.

"Did you see Lachlan, then?" asked Mr. Eagles.

"Yes, more than once. He is likely to get on in the world, I think, and is grown a fine, muscular fellow—a regular Hercules. He says it is navvy work that has made him so big."

"And where have you been since you left this country?"

"Principally in Italy. And now I must try to prepare you for good news. What is the best preparation? Instant relief from suspense, I believe. I have found William!"

Mr. Eagles jumped from his seat, and grasped Mr. Oliver's shoulder, as if he were going to collar him. Miss Eagles clasped her hands, and screamed. The sudden shock of a great and unexpected joy is harder to bear calmly than a great sorrow.

Ellen Eagles found this. She could restrain the long pent-up current of her feelings no longer, and she had a violent fit of hysterics. The attention of the two men was immediately turned to her. Mr. Eagles was beside himself, and made her worse by lavishing upon her every term of endearment. Mr. Oliver, on the contrary, always self-possessed and master of his feelings, told her

authoritatively to be calm, and he would tell her all.

But he held her hand firmly the while, and there was that in the pressure of his, which soothed her even more than his words.

At last the hysterical sobs ended in a flood of tears, that relieved her, and she tried to laugh at her weakness, and apologize for it.

"I was too sudden," said Mr. Oliver, stroking the black hair as the head leaned upon her father's arm.

He, too, seemed to see the white threads, and to be moved to unusual tenderness of manner. He used to smooth down the raven braids long years ago, and Ellen looked up at him with a sudden childish joy that moved him greatly.

"Thank you, Mr. Oliver, I am better now. Will you tell us where my brother is, and when he is coming home?"

"He is in London now, and waits for his father's summons."

"Oh! my God! I thank thee!" said Mr. Eagles, bowing his head over his daughter, and letting fall the tears that had been gathering in his eyes.

At last the trio sat down quietly, and Mr.

Oliver told them as follows, how he had found their son and brother.

"You remember, Ellen, that I told you that I thought I had seen William, and that he had not recognized me, when I was in Italy last. Well, this time I was determined to search for him; so I set to work as soon as I was abroad. I did not go to Greece with Nux, but made a voyage amongst the painters instead. I think I visited every picture gallery in Italy, and was nearly giving up in despair, when one day, at Florence, I met him, face to face, in the street.

"Aged, bearded like a monkey, thin, pale, he was; but I knew him by his eyes. He tried to escape me, but I caught hold of his arm, and said, 'William Eagles, I know you and you know me. It is no good to run away, for I shall follow you.'

"He stood still, and we shook hands. I scarcely think he was glad to see me. I made him come with me to my hotel, and told him all that I knew of you—your health and circumstances.

"He listened, but told me nothing in return. He was then minute in his inquiries about everything at Yeo, except poor Mary Bull. When I

said, unasked, that she was dead, he was greatly affected.

"I never lost sight of him for days, and managed to work upon his feelings so as to draw forth a wish to revisit England. I did not venture to tell him that you would be glad to see him, because I scarcely knew whether you would receive him or not, after his long silence and neglect.

"Of his own history he told me nothing, except that he was a celebrated painter, and had achieved the fame abroad that he had coveted at home.

"He is morose and moody. The old temper is underneath the surface, but somewhat crusted over and kept down by the conventionalities of life. In spite of fame, of which he boasts, he is not happy. Still he lives in his art, to all outward appearance, and is highly esteemed amongst his brother artists in Italy.

"He will soon be equally so in England. His pictures have already reached large prices, though he was too late for the Exhibition.

"But I am before my story. By dint of great persuasion I succeeded in getting him to England; but we were weeks together in London before I could persuade him to let me tell you of his

arrival there. He has some secret on his mind which makes him restless, and always starting at shadows. He declared he could never face you again, or any of the Bull family.

"He is in wretched health—a very wreck of his old self, though handsome as the picture of the banished lord—something like it, in fact.

"Even if you, Mr. Eagles, are forgiving enough to write to him I scarcely think he will come here. At one moment he says he will return to Italy, that he cannot breathe in this close, miserable atmosphere; the next he declares there is no country like England.

"He is hipped and nervous. His hand trembles as if he were an habitual drunkard, but I believe him to be quite the reverse.

"If he came to Yeo—supposing that you write to recal him—it would be with the understanding that he is not to be questioned on his history. He evidently does not choose to say what reason he had for not writing to you for so many years.

"Before I brought him over I made one proviso, which was, that he should not, as he used to do, dun you for money. He got into a passion at my even suggesting it, and asked me, as in old times, what money was good for, if not to enable

a man to pursue the high aims of life—art and the like—but I was firm and obtained his promise."

At this point of Mr. Oliver Bat's narrative Mr. Eagles interrupted him by a question, which was followed by others from Miss Eagles.

"Is he still poor, then?" he asked.

"Yes, I think so. At all events he had no ready money."

"And you supplied him?" asked Ellen.

Mr. Oliver was silent.

"How ungrateful I have been," she continued, looking at him with her piercing eyes softened by tears.

The glance that was returned through the spectacles told as plainly as glance could tell, that the dry, cynical bachelor would do anything for her brother.

"And he is ill?" said Mr. Eagles.

"I fear he is. He has a cough which he attributes to English fog, but which I heard even at Florence; and he is very much thinner than he used to be."

"Does he care to see us again?" asked Ellen.

"Yes. That is to say he would care, if he were quite sure that he should not be questioned

about the past, or reproached for it. He is painfully irritable."

"Was he so with you?"

"He would have been if I had let him; but I stopped him short by telling him that it was our place, not his, to be irritable and captious."

"Ah!" said Mr. Eagles, "if I can only see him once more before I die I should not care how he behaved to me. Thank you,—bless you—God will bless you, Mr. Oliver, for giving me back my son."

"Then you will write to him?"

"Could you doubt it? Yes, and receive him on his own terms; even to giving him all that I have."

"And Ellen?"

"Will do the same," said Miss Eagles. "All I have on earth to see him once more."

The trio were silent a while.

At last Mr. Oliver said, hastily, "Ellen, you look ill: you are ill. What can I give you?"

It was very evident that she was ill. Her face was white, and her lips were pale as those of a corpse. She had kept her attention alive as long as the story lasted, and now, the first excitement being over, she felt suddenly faint.

"I will go to bed," she said, and tried to rise from her chair.

Mr. Oliver saved her from falling.

"I will carry her upstairs," he said to Mr. Eagles; "show me the way."

The agitated father preceded, and Mr. Oliver bore the fainting girl to her room, and laid her on the bed.

He rang the bell violently, and the little maid appeared.

"Get some woman immediately," he said to the child; "a nurse, and the doctor."

"Miss Lyons, sir?" said the frightened Jenny.

"Yes—yes," cried Mr. Eagles.

In less than ten minutes, Kezia Lyons was in the room, breathless and bonnetless. She had only stopped to get some brandy and smelling salts.

But when she arrived, Miss Eagles was slowly recovering, under the influence of the cold water, copiously thrown over her by Mr. Oliver Bat. Poor Mr. Eagles was too distracted to know where to find any restoratives.

"She will be better soon," said Kezia, taking her place by the bed; "you had better go down, sir."

The bewildered father kissed his child's pale

lips, and obeyed mechanically. Mr. Oliver lingered a moment.

"Let me feel her pulse, Miss Lyons," he said.

He took her hand, and found that it was returning. She opened her eyes upon him and smiled.

He, too, kissed her cold forehead, and said, "God bless you, Ellen!"

"I have known her from a child," he added, half apologetically, turning to Kezia.

"I know, sir," said that gentle girl. "I was sure this must come upon her. She has been failing for months, and no wonder, I am sure."

Mr. Oliver shook hands with Kezia, and begged her not to leave Miss Eagles.

"Not till she is better, be assured," she said.

Then he went down stairs to Mr. Eagles.

As he was descending the last stair, he met his groom in the passage with the parcel. The man had come into the house, because he could not make himself heard at the door. Mr. Oliver told him to stop for a note to his brother. He wrote a few lines to say that he probably should remain some hours at the Nest, and possibly might not return home that night. He de-

spatched the groom, and taking the parcel from him, carried it into the parlour.

When he saw poor Mr. Eagles with his face covered with his handkerchief, to conceal his tears, and thought of Ellen upstairs, he heartily wished that he had not hunted out a son and a brother who had never caused them anything but trouble from his childhood till that very moment.

He put the parcel on the table, and began to comfort Mr. Eagles; but Kezia soon brought them better comfort in the news that their Ellen was recovering, and in bed.

Kezia, with her womanly tact and kindness, set about preparing tea, nominally for Miss Eagles, but really for all, and before she left the gentlemen, had the satisfaction of seeing Mr. Eagles pouring out tea for his guest.

Mr. Oliver Bat was not one of those who like tea-dinners, or are indifferent to the pleasures of the table, but, for once, he yielded to circumstances, and looked at the uninebriating beverage through his spectacles, instead of at the more exhilarating one that he would have so examined at home.

Mr. Perch arrived during this meal, and looked surprised at the unexpected appearance of a Bat

at tea in the Eagles' Nest; but was too wise a fish himself to make any remark.

He duly visited his patient, much to her disgust, and tried to make her believe that she was much worse than she thought herself, and must keep perfectly quiet for some time.

"Over excitement of some kind, over work, over-wrought brain," he said to Kezia, pulling and stroking a very large pair of whiskers.

And, in truth, more than the usual brightness shone in the patient's eyes, and more than the ordinary flush on her cheeks. Moreover, she talked rapidly.

Mr. Perch told Mr. Eagles to avoid exciting her in any way, and left, promising to send a composing draught.

Kezia went home for a short time to account for her lengthened absence, and returned to remain the night.

Ellen composed herself for sleep with perfect goodwill when she heard that Mr. Oliver was still with her father.

CHAPTER III.

ANN ELLIS.

"WHAT is that great brown parcel, I wonder?" said Mr. Eagles, stopping short in a rapid walk he was taking round the room.

"A parcel I brought down from London from young Lyons to your daughter," replied Mr. Oliver.

The pair had been talking of the prodigal son till they had fairly exhausted the subject, and become almost as excited over it as Ellen had been.

"It seems to contain books," said Mr. Eagles; "I shall open it."

"What! your daughter's parcel?" said Mr. Oliver, peering at the address, at which he had more than once peered before, through those glasses of his.

"Oh, yes! We always open one another's parcels. We have no secrets."

Mr. Oliver thought of the "anonymous," and elevated his eyebrows, thereby moving his spectacles. Mr. Eagles, too, suddenly remembered *the* one secret. But he began to untie the cord nevertheless.

Soon both the men were engaged in unfastening an intricate knot, which Mr. Eagles was about to cut, when Mr. Oliver came to the rescue of the cord.

"I never cut twine when I can possibly unfasten the knot," he said. "Let me do it. I am used to knots."

Mr. Eagles gave it up to him, and in due time the long piece of string was triumphantly displayed intact.

"You open the parcel, I would not do it for worlds," he said, looking on with masculine curiosity, whilst the father undid the many layers of paper that covered the contents.

"Why it looks as if it came from a publisher's," said Mr. Eagles. "It is wrapped in a quantity of proof sheets, or loose sheets of some book."

"There is a letter; you have dropped it," said

Mr. Oliver, picking up one as he spoke. "You mustn't open this."

"Well, I might if I liked; but perhaps it may amuse Ellen to open it herself to-morrow."

"It may be a love-letter," said Mr. Oliver, grimly. "That young man looks as if he could write a good one."

"Pooh!" said Mr. Eagles. "A mere boy! such a disparity!"

"Do you object to disparities?"

"Well, on the wrong side."

"Which do you call the right side in matrimony? They must both be right, or both be wrong, and that's a paradox."

"Five copies of the same book!" exclaimed Mr. Eagles. "What could make the boy send so many?"

"Most likely some unlucky author has palmed them off upon him for sale among his friends, and he has sent them to Miss Eagles. I once had a score of books that I promised to sell in an unguarded moment. I sold two copies, and had to pay for eighteen myself, as I didn't like to disappoint the author."

"And such a name!" said Mr. Eagles, opening one of the books, "Ann Ellis."

"I rather like it," said Mr. Oliver. "Who is it by?"

"There is no name, only two Greek E's."

"Oh! Let me see. The same initials as those articles in the 'Metropolitan Magazine.' They were very clever. This is lucky. We can have a new book apiece. Shall we have a light?"

"And a fire?" suggested Mr. Eagles. "As Ellen is away, I may venture upon the extravagance of a fire and two candles."

He rang the bell, and ordered the same of Jenny. Mr. Oliver looked comforted.

Jenny was so frightened at having to light a fire before Mr. Oliver Bat, that she lost all her skill and presence of mind. Mr. Eagles went up to inquire for Ellen, and Mr. Oliver took the bellows out of the girl's hands, and began to blow.

"Have you been to fetch any more letters lately?" he asked, as he puffed away at a piece of wood that would not kindle.

"Uch a beant a gwain to tell no more, zur," said Jenny, throwing down the remainder of the wood, and running out of the room.

"Wise girl!" said Mr. Oliver, proceeding de-

liberately to employ the materials that Jenny had left behind.

He soon succeeded in making a fire. Then he went out into the kitchen to look for Jenny.

"Give me a log of wood, or I'll ask you more questions about the letters," he said, as his little victim was running away.

"Lawkaday! pleese zur don' 'ee. Miss 'll turn me away, hur 'ull, and mother 'll a moast kill me."

"Give me the wood then," and Jenny ran off, and carried plenty of wood into the parlour, whilst Mr. Oliver stood admiring the neatness of the little kitchen.

When he returned to the parlour, he found the fire heaped up, the candles lighted, and the curtains drawn.

"Poor Ellen!" he soliloquized. "An extravagance to have a fire and two candles!"

Mr. Eagles came back rubbing his hands.

"She is fast asleep, and Kezia says she is better," he said.

"Then we may read the books," said Mr. Oliver, drawing his chair to the fire, the table and one candle close to the chair, and

putting his feet on the fender. "Now, this is comfort!"

"What a Sybarite you are! You will never be fit to rough it."

"I hope I never shall. Here is a simple dedication. I like it as much as the name. 'To my Father.' It reminds me of Soyer's inscription on his wife's tomb. 'To Her.' Now, don't talk any more. I am going to read."

Mr. Eagles laughed.

"It is you who are talking. You remind me of the king of Tartary, or China, or somewhere, who has it proclaimed, that when he has dined, all the kings of the earth may dine. You want to read, everybody else may read."

"But I haven't done reading, so everybody else may not talk."

The two gentlemen were soon so deep in the history of Ann Ellis, that they ceased to talk each of his own good pleasure. A grunt of approbation from Mr. Oliver, and an occasional "good," "capital," from Mr. Eagles, alone breaking the silence.

Mr. Oliver was a quick reader. He had got through the first volume by ten o'clock. As he

laid it down, he exclaimed, quite enthusiastically for him—

"I declare, I haven't read such a novel as that —if novel you may call it—for ages."

"I am so glad you have spoken," said Mr. Eagles. "How good this is — and this — and this!" And he read out one or two passages that had particularly struck him.

"Yes — no maudlin nonsense," said Mr. Oliver. "It's a man—the author I mean. A woman would not have written in that terse, caustic, somewhat bitter spirit. I hate the catch-penny, cowardly practice of not putting a name to a book."

"I don't think a man would have written that description of a woman's dress," said Mr. Eagles.

"Ah! Now don't talk any more. I must finish the book before I go to bed. By-the-way, will you let me lie down on the sofa, by-and-by? I should like to know how Ellen is to-morrow morning, and——"

"To finish the book," supplied Mr. Eagles.

"Yes, it interests one. But you had better go to bed."

"We must have some supper first. Can you eat bread and cheese, and drink cyder?"

"Of course I can, provided, always, the cheese isn't the native double Dorset. I have tried to masticate that, but in vain."

"No—I had some Cheddar sent me the other day, in payment of Sam Bolter's quarter, having positively declined the Dorset, though it was moulded, as green as the grass that helped to make it."

"I believe this story is laid in Dorsetshire," said Mr. Oliver. "The little native dialect there is, is pure Saxon; and how expressive it is!"

Certainly, Mr. Oliver Bat was not the most polite of guests. Whilst eating his supper, he was devouring "Ann Ellis," at the same time, and occasionally reading aloud scraps that particularly attracted him.

"This reminds one of old times," said Mr. Eagles. "You have not supped with me in this friendly way for years. If we had William here!"

"He will come, and then we will have a real supper. Just listen to this."

Mr. Oliver read two or three pages aloud. They related to a father and daughter, and were very pathetic.

"That reminds me of Ellen," said Mr. Eagles, wiping his eyes.

"Many things in this book remind me of her," said Mr. Oliver. "There are not many Ellens in the world after all."

"Thank you! God bless you for saying that!"

The excitable Mr. Eagles got up, and shook hands with his more phlegmatic companion.

"Don't put my arm out of joint," said the latter, smiling.

"You and your brothers have always been our staunchest friends," said Mr. Eagles.

After supper, they trimmed the fire and the candles, and once more went on with 'Ann Ellis.' Mr. Eagles told Jenny to go to bed, and begged Kezia Lyons to do the same. As Miss Eagles continued to sleep, they both did so, leaving the two gentlemen to their self-imposed task.

Nothing was heard in the quiet little house, but the ticking of the clock in the kitchen, and the cricket on the hearth, whilst the two men read Ellen Eagles' book—her book, in whom both were equally interested. The hours went on—twelve, one, two o'clock, and still they were not tired.

"There's two o'clock, Mr. Eagles," said Mr. Oliver, "you had better go to bed. You will

have to work to-morrow; and really it is absurd to sit up over a novel in this way."

"I suppose I must," said Mr. Eagles, drawing a long breath, "and having just restored Ann to her father, I may as well leave them together for the present. It is a wonderful book!"

"Wonderful indeed! Who can be the author! I wish I knew him. Now do go to bed. Ellen would be very angry if she knew."

"And you?"

"I am used to late hours. I shall finish the book. I am half through the third volume. The print is so large, and the margin so wide, that more than half the three volumes are filled with waste paper. I wonder that respectable publishers make a profit in waste paper, don't you?"

"I hope it ends well?" said Mr. Eagles. "I hate a book that ends badly. One has enough of misery in real life, without being harrowed by more in fiction."

"Yes; everybody marries everybody. I peeped. Now, go to bed."

"Very well: good night, my dear friend. I shall dream of that John Timbs and Jonas Wall."

"And I of Ann Ellis. I am in love with her already. Good night."

Mr. Eagles left the room.

"I am glad he is gone," soliloquized Mr. Oliver. "How ill he looks; ten years older. And Ellen with white hairs! They have been cruelly scandalized; and I, for one, have done my part, by running away when I might have helped them. They look half starved. Poor little Ellen!"

He heaped more coal and wood on the fire, and returned to his book.

He read on until he finished it. Then he put it down, and closed it, exclaiming aloud—

"A wonderful book! Yes, Mr. Eagles, you are right, it *is* a wonderful book."

Then he sat over the fire, pondering on the characters and plot, until he nearly fell asleep in his chair, and finally he turned to look at the little sofa. The thoughtful Kezia had caused pillows and blankets to be placed upon it, on and in which he laid his head and enwrapped his body, and soon fell asleep and dreamed of Ellen Eagles and Ann Ellis.

None of the birds in the Nest were up with the dawn on the following morning; all slept late.

Kezia and Mr. Oliver Bat were the earliest astir, and met in the passage.

"I am going home," he said; "how is Miss Eagles?"

"She has had a very good night, sir, and is still sleeping."

"Tell her, when she awakes, that she has six copies of the best novel I have read for years, in her possession, and that I advise her to amuse herself by reading it. If any of them are for sale, I will take a copy."

It was ten o'clock and past when Ellen awoke from that opiate-induced sleep. Kezia had been anxiously awaiting her awakening, fearful lest the opiate should have been too powerful. She did not know that many months had passed since the sleeper had slept a good, sound, natural sleep, and that the tired body and wearied mind were alike forced into a rest that was equally beneficial to both.

The awakening, however, after an opiate, is not pleasant; and it was some time before Ellen sufficiently recovered her recollection of the events of the previous day, to know whether she ought to awake happy or miserable. By degrees, however, she decided on the former alternative, and ate as

much breakfast as she possibly could, to please Kezia.

In the midst of it, the canter of a well-known pony was heard up the lane, and soon a well-known brisk, but gentle, tapping sounded on the bedroom door.

"Come in, dear Aline," said Miss Eagles, cheerfully.

"Mark told us you were very ill," said Aline, entering and hastening towards the bed. She kissed Miss Eagles as young girls, with warm natures, know how to kiss, and then began to ask what she could do for her, in the short period that she was allowed, by her mother, to stay with her.

"Mamma has some new books—she asks if you would like to read them?" she said.

"Oh, Miss Eagles," said Kezia, "Mr. Oliver Bat told me to tell you that there is a book down stairs, which he advises you to read, as it is the best novel he has read for years. There are six copies of it, and if they are for sale, he will take one."

Miss Eagles's face flushed such a crimson as the two young girls had never seen in it before, except when sudden anger or indignation sent the colour thither. They trembled lest there

should be a covert insult under Mr. Oliver's message.

"When did he say so? How did he know? When did he read it?" said Miss Eagles.

"He sat up till morning reading it, and Mr. Eagles sat up too, till, I fancy, Mr. Bat sent him to bed."

"Leave me one moment—five minutes only," said Miss Eagles to the two girls, with a voice in which some strong emotion was audible to both.

They left the room.

Tears—big, natural tears—fell fast from those black eyes, as they were turned upwards in unutterable thankfulness. These, and the clasped hands, told, without words, that Ellen was thanking the great Giver of Good for granting her one wish at last.

In ten minutes she had conquered her emotion, and recalled her young friends.

"Will you bring me those books, Kezia?"

Kezia again left the room.

"Dear Miss Eagles, will you not tell me what is the matter with you?" said Aline. "He—Mr. Oliver—has not been unkind again?"

"No—no, dearest Aline. I am so happy—so proud—so—oh! pray that I may keep my senses.

My brother found—my book—all at once. It is too much for me, the poor, despised Ellen Eagles!"

Her eyes shone so, that Aline looked frightened.

"You shall know all soon, Aline. I am happy, thankful, most thankful."

Kezia returned with the large parcel of books, neatly done up by Mr. Oliver Bat, much as it had been when he brought it from London.

Ellen looked puzzled and disappointed.

"They cannot have read it, Kezia."

"That was Mr. Bat's message."

"Did he bring no other novel with him?"

"I think not; he has left none."

Ellen untied the parcel with trembling fingers. Lachlan's letter was at the top. She put it aside, and opened one of the books, her heart beating rapidly, as authors' hearts usually beat when they see their first printed book. It is quite a pleasant palpitation, no matter whether the book be good or bad. Reviewers haven't pulled it to pieces yet, and there it lies, the veritable first-born of the teeming brain.

"What a pretty cover," said Aline; "I delight in the look of a perfectly new book. Will you lend it to me?"

"I cannot think how people can waste their time in writing and reading novels," said the less imaginative Kezia.

"You will read this for my sake, Kezia, and tell me what you think of it," said Miss Eagles. "I should like the unbiassed opinion of a genuine mind, not already cloyed with reading."

"I am not sure that it would be right," said Kezia.

"For my sake," said Miss Eagles.

"Very well, Miss Eagles. I know you would not tell me to do anything wrong."

"When you have both read it, I will tell you a secret connected with it, and read you this letter from Lachlan."

"Dear Lachlan," cried Aline, clapping her hands, "how I should like to see him again!"

"Aline, you asked if you could do anything for me," said Miss Eagles. "You may do me one great favour. Will you ride on to the Lodge, and give a parcel for me to Mr. Oliver Bat? It must be delivered into his own hands."

"Yes," replied Aline, "at once, if you wish. Indeed it must be at once, as mamma will soon be ready for me."

"Will you give me a pencil?" said Miss Eagles.

Kezia gave her one.

She opened the title-page of the first volume of Ann Ellis, and wrote, in pencil, the words, "Ellen Eagles," after the two Greek E's—her anonymous initials. Then, after the name of the publisher, she wrote "The anonymous correspondent."

Turning to the fly-leaf, she wrote, "Mr. Oliver Bat, from the author." This done, she wrapped the copy of the book up in one of the many sheets of brown paper, and gave it into Aline's care.

Aline was soon cantering over the Downs, with the parcel under her arm, and Max barking at her pony's heels.

I am afraid that neither she nor Miss Eagles considered whether it was quite according to the rules of propriety for so young a damsel to visit three bachelors.

In due course of time she was at the Lodge. Having opened the entrance gate, and trotted up the drive, she jumped off her pony, rang the door-bell, asked for Mr. Oliver Bat, and mounted her pony again.

That gentleman soon appeared.

"Here is a parcel from Miss Eagles, Mr. Oliver.

I was at the Nest, and she asked me to bring it to you."

"Thank you, Aline. How is she now?"

"Better—and very happy. Don't make her unhappy again. Good bye."

Aline cantered off without awaiting an answer, and left Mr. Oliver to unravel the secret.

CHAPTER IV.

MR. OLIVER BAT UNDECEIVED.

Ellen was obliged to give her few pupils a holiday, an unusual thing for her to do. She sat alone that afternoon idly thinking. Her father was in the school-room, and Kezia had returned home, with a promise to come back in the evening.

Perhaps Ellen had never looked so handsome before. She was very pale, and her eyes were calmer, but not less brilliant than usual. The small, well-set head leaned back on the easy chair, and she seemed to be watching the afternoon clouds and sunbeams, as they roamed and darted through the autumnal sky.

She was thinking of many things. Of her brother—her book—Mr. Oliver Bat—Kezia—Aline—but mostly of her father. Should she, could she, by her writing, support him in his

declining years? How many have hoped to gain competence by literary labour—how few have succeeded! But this, Ellen had yet to learn.

She was interrupted in her daydreams by the sudden entrance of Mr. Oliver Bat.

As he came into the room, he bowed profoundly, and said, in a way somewhat dry and respectful—

"How are you, Miss Eagles?"

Ellen's colour came and went, as she put out her hand, and answered nervously—

"Quite well now, thank you."

"You don't look well," he said, taking a seat opposite her, at a good distance.

There was a pause.

"And am I really to congratulate you on having written that book?" he said at last.

"Yes, if it deserves congratulation."

"It is so good that I did not believe it was the work of a woman."

"You never had a high opinion of the intellect of women."

"I always hated clever women, until——"

Ellen waited for the concluding word. It did not come.

"Hated is a strong word," she said.

"Too strong. I dislike them because I never

met with many who were not, in some way, disagreeable. I hate people who set up for being clever."

"Men and women," suggested Ellen.

"Certainly—certainly."

Another pause.

At last, "You expect me to compliment you," said Mr. Oliver. "If I said all I think of that book, I should raise your vanity, perhaps—if, indeed anything I could say, could make you, or any other woman vain."

Ellen looked at Mr. Oliver. She had never seen him so nervous, or heard him so humble. He generally assumed, to the full, the tone of masculine superiority.

"Oh! Mr. Oliver, you know that I value your opinion more than——next to my father's, in short."

"In literature?" he asked inquiringly, without raising his eyes from a riding-whip with which he was fidgetting.

"In all things. Have you not been my friend and teacher for years?"

Mr. Oliver made an impatient movement.

"But you said of late that you had ceased to believe in my friendship?"

"Because you had ceased to believe in my—"

Ellen could not find the right word, and paused.

"Can you ever forgive my doubt?"

Mr. Oliver's face blushed—literally blushed as he bent lower over his whip.

"The fault was mine," said Ellen, humbly—she could afford to be humble now she had triumphed —"the fault was in my long concealment. It has been already punished enough. It has nearly killed me."

"And all those letters were——?"

"To and from publishers."

"Has the result been worth the struggle?"

"Yes—no—I can scarcely tell as yet. I do not know what my father will say."

"Once more, will you forgive my doubt? and all that I once dared to say to you?"

"Yes."

"And may I be restored to my old place in your—your—friendship?"

"You have never forfeited it. I have so few friends, that I cannot afford to give up one, even if he gives me up. Kezia Lyons and Aline are the only ones who have remained faithful. They knew me, for I taught them what I believed to be right. They, and——perhaps, you."

"Perhaps? Oh Miss Eagles! if you had read my heart all this time?"

"Your countenance rarely told that you had one to read."

Mr. Oliver still fidgeting with his whip, his head half way down to his knees—Ellen pulling a flower to pieces that she had taken from a vase on a table at her side.

"Then I find I am a better master of my face than of my feelings," said the former.

"And I of my feelings than my face," said the latter.

At that moment each involuntarily looked up, and their eyes met. Assuredly neither was master or mistress of face or feelings then!

Another pause. At last—

"Ellen," began Mr. Oliver, "I have loved you ever since you came here with your father, twenty years ago, a ten year old child. I was then a young man of seven-and-twenty. I had been jilted, as you know, by a heartless girl, and you healed the wound for me. I loved you as a father, or elder brother; much as I now love Aline. As you grew up, I loved you still. Of late years the feeling has deepened; strengthened into such a love as a man can only feel once in his

life, and that for the woman he would make his wife. But I never dared to suppose that you, seventeen years younger than I, could ever reciprocate this feeling, so I never dreamed of telling you of it, until that day on the Downs, when it escaped me—and when——but I cannot again allude to that. Still less now can I imagine that the woman of genius—the—the—you, in short,—could ever respond to the feelings of such a dry, cynical, old bachelor as I am. Why do not such feelings die, as old bachelorhood comes on?"

Again Mr. Oliver played with his whip.

Reader! I dare say you have been interrupted at the very moment when you least desired an interruption. Just as you were going to make or to receive a proposal, for instance Perhaps the interruption was a fortunate event in your life,—perhaps it ruined your one chance. So, whatever the result, an interruption came to Mr. Oliver's proposal, just as he was actually going to make it: and prevented his and our knowing how Ellen would receive it. If you are fond of proposals and love scenes, and at all interested in this couple, I am sorry for you: for you will never again have so good an opportunity of listening to one between them.

The interruption came in the shape of Mr. Eagles, who was too much occupied in a variety of other subjects, to notice the exceedingly cross expression of Mr. Oliver's countenance, or to hear the very doubtful word he addressed to his whip. He even failed to perceive the sudden cloud that passed over his Ellen's face. The following conversation ensued.

Mr. Eagles (throwing the third volume of "Ann Ellis" on his daughter's table). "Well! I don't like the book. And you told me it ended well, Mr. Oliver!"

Mr. Oliver and Ellen (both starting up, and forgetting interruption, whip, and rose). "Why?"

Mr. Eagles. "Because, after all, she married that man nearly old enough to be her father."

Mr. Oliver. "Is that your only objection? Why shouldn't she marry him if she liked him?"

Mr. Eagles (puzzled). "Why? Because—well I don't exactly know; but twenty years!"

Mr. O. "You seem to have an insuperable objection to disparities of age."

Mr. E. "I really have. My poor wife and I were about the same age."

Mr. O. "Supposing either of my brothers was to marry now? Nicholas, for instance. He is upwards of fifty. Would it be indispensable for him to have a wife upwards of fifty?"

Mr. E. "I think she should be fifty at least."

Mr. O. "Pooh! Myself, then. Must my wife be forty-six or seven, I think it is?"

Mr. E. "Well; I always look on you as a boy, because you and William were young men together. By the way, I have written to William, entreating him to come. Have you, Ellen?"

Ellen. "Yes, father. But what other faults do you find with 'Ann Ellis?'"

Mr. E. "No other, literally no other. It is a very clever book—very. Almost severe and caustic enough for you, Ellen. Have you begun it?"

Ellen. "Yes, and finished it?"

Mr. E. "What, already? Then you merely skimmed it through, and it deserves to be read thoroughly."

Ellen. "Was there anything in that book, father, that you would wish expunged? You are a severe critic. Anything of which you would say, as you did of a book the other day,

'How could a woman have written it? It is so coarse.'"

Mr. Eagles (reflectively). "No, certainly not. But I do not believe any woman did write it. Do you know anything of the author? What made Lachlan send you so many copies? Surely he never wrote it. The very idea is absurd. I am sure there is some secret connected with the book. Light of my eyes! what is it?"

Mr. Oliver. "What would you wish it to be? If the book were written by a lady—if that lady were not much above thirty—if I had loved her ever since she was a child, and if I would marry her if she would have me, would you give your consent? As my old friend, for instance, looking on me as a boy?"

Mr. Eagles. "How absurdly you talk! You know you wouldn't ask my consent?"

Mr. Oliver. "But I certainly should. Ellen, what do *you* say? Ought I not to ask his consent? *May* I not ask it? or is the disparity too great? Was the suspicion too base?"

Ellen (looking at Mr. Oliver in answer to an inquiring glance from him). "Tell him all—say what you like."

Mr. Oliver. If the author of that book were

your daughter Ellen, and if I, your friend, her friend, William's friend—were to ask you to give her to me, would you consent?"

Mr. Eagles (looking from one to the other). "What do you mean? Not that you—not that my Ellen— ?"

Ellen. "Yes, father. It is my book. I wrote it; and since you like it, and—and—Mr. Oliver likes it—I am content."

Poor Ellen! crowning day of a hard life. No wonder that the colour varies in your face, and the tears begin to fall. To have every blessing so long striven for at once, is beyond your fondest hopes.

Mr. Eagles looked bewildered. He thought it was all a pantomime. He could not believe it. But, at last, when, as in the scene in a real play, he saw Ellen's hand in that of Mr. Oliver Bat, and then suddenly felt her arms round his own neck, and her cheek against his cheek, he began to perceive that there was some reality in the matter.

"My Ellen! my child! You wrote that book? When and how?" he said.

"Never mind the book!" said Mr. Oliver, impatiently. "Hang the book. If it hadn't been for that—I beg your pardon, Ellen. Yes! she

wrote that book: but you have not answered my question, a much more important matter than all the books in Christendom."

Again Mr. Eagles looked from Mr. Oliver to Ellen, and from Ellen to Mr. Oliver. Ellen's sense of the ludicrous was touched by her father's fierce gaze into Mr. Oliver's spectacles, and she burst out laughing.

"Oh! what a relief, my dear Ellen!" said Mr. Oliver, and they all sat down and laughed together, Mr. Eagles being very near crying at the same time.

"What a want of true sentiment!" said Mr. Oliver. "But will you answer my question, now we are all returned to the world as it is? Ellen, will you tell me, and your father, whether you could ever love an old fellow like me well enough to marry me?"

Ellen smiled, and looked at her father.

"Father! you know!" she said.

"Upon my soul I don't!" said Mr. Eagles.

"The disparity," said Mr. Oliver. "My seventeen years?"

"My dear Oliver—my dear friend—my old kind friend—William's friend—God bless you both! It is too much. An author! such a book

—such a husband. It is too much. God bless you both for ever!"

Here Mr. Eagles fairly broke down.

Mr. Oliver was by no means given to a display of feelings; so he said, with his most comical expression of countenance, "Oh, if you are to be made miserable, I am sure neither Ellen nor I would think of carrying out our plans. I have so many good jokes in my mind that you must be brisk. I shall not consider myself engaged until I have the consent of all my friends. Let me see. There are my brothers, of course; the Loves and Daws, who are family connections; and Mr. Raven,—I must have the blessing of the clergy. Now don't frown, Ellen. I admire your beetling brows, but you must never knit them upon me again."

By this time Mr. Eagles had recovered himself, and various little passages and explanations took place which are of no consequence to the progress of our tale, though very interesting to the parties themselves. I shall give the results.

When Mr. Oliver Bat left the Nest, declaring himself and feeling a very happy man, he carried with him three copies of "Ann Ellis." Arrived

at home, he shut himself up in his library, and made two of the said copies up into two neat brown paper parcels, one of which he directed to Captain Love, and the other to the Miss. Daws. He wrote two precise little notes with them, the contents of which were to the following effect.

He told Captain Love that knowing him to be an author and a literary man, and a correspondent of the "Dorset Director," he should be glad of his opinion on the work he sent him; he also hoped that the ladies would read it, and criticise it in their usual fair and able manner. He begged the Captain to lend the book to Mr. and Miss Raven, as soon as he and his family had read it, as he also wished to have his opinion upon it.

To Miss Daw he said that he was anxious that she and her sisters should read a new work that had been recommended to him under rather peculiar circumstances, and that he would call in a week or so and discuss its merits with them. They were at liberty to lend it to their neighbour, Mr. Perch, when they had finished it.

Mr. Oliver knew well enough that his wishes would have immediate attention from all parties, for were not he and his brothers bachelors of for-

tune, eligible as partners for life, or as testators.

Having despatched these parcels, by a man who grumbled at having "to leave his work of a sudden," he wrote a note to the Secretary of the Yeominster Reading Society, of which he was a member, and ordered "Ann Ellis" into the club.

Then he went to dinner.

The dining-room at the Lodge was a very comfortable apartment. It was nearly eight o'clock when he entered it, and his brothers were waiting for him. They had spoiled this youngest brother Oliver, when he was a lad, and they spoilt him still, persistently looking upon him as a boy.

The three brothers sat down to a very good dinner. They lived well—as bachelors generally do; they had the usual complement of servants to wait upon them, and kept up their country establishment as their father had done before them.

They were too hungry, and enjoyed the dinner too much to talk whilst the ceremony of eating was going on, but usually discussed the events of the day over their wine, when the servants had left the room. Such was the case on the present occasion.

Mr. Bat and Mr. Nicholas went from the head

and bottom of the table to the cheerful fire; and Mr. Oliver turned round,—he always took care to sit with his back to the fire at table,—and put his feet on the fender and his glass on the mantelpiece.

"Well, Nicholas, what sport?" asked Mr. Bat. He always addressed the eldest first.

"Pretty good. I killed four brace of partridges, and a fine cock pheasant."

"I wish you'd send the pheasant and a brace of partridges to the Nest, Nick," said Oliver.

"With all my heart. Is that where you've been this afternoon again? How's Miss Eagles?"

"Better."

"And the old gentleman? I'm quite sorry to see him look so careworn."

"Better too. They'll be all right by-and-by.

"I sent Eagles a goose and a dozen of wine to-day. I hope he won't be offended?" said Mr. Bat.

"Thank you, brother," said Mr. Oliver. "You've the best heart of any man I know."

"I'm glad you think so, my boy. It's warm enough towards some folks. I have always a great pity for decent people struggling against circumstances, and for young people in trouble.

I wish we had always helped the Eagles more, and that young Lyons more liberally. But I did not know, till you told us this morning, how poor they really were."

Mr. Oliver took up his glass, sipped his wine, put it down again; took up the poker, stirred the fire, put it down again; took up the hearth-brush, swept a few crumbs from the hearth-rug, put it down again.

"You'll never marry, after all," said Mr. Nicholas, laughing.

Mr. Nicholas, by the way, was a very good-looking man in his dinner toilette.

"Why not?" asked Oliver, briskly.

"You're a more thorough bachelor than either of us. Look at those crumbs. Why, you're as good as a housemaid."

"But I have quite made up my mind to marry."

"I'm glad to hear it," laughed Mr. Bat. "But you've said it so often. I know it must be some one you've met abroad. An Italian perhaps?"

Mr. Oliver shook his head.

"A Frenchwoman?" suggested Mr. Nicholas.

"Thoroughly English," said Mr. Oliver.

"I only wish you were not jesting," said Mr.

Bat. "One of us ought to marry. Now, I'm too old; Nick won't; and you——"

"Will!" said Mr. Oliver.

"Who is it?" asked both brothers at once.

"An author," said Mr. Oliver.

"A what?"

"An author—a writer of books—a blue-stocking—a literary lady."

"Oh! Oliver; that may be very well for you," said Mr. Nicholas, "but she will be no good to us."

"But you're not going to marry her."

"No; but we should always look on your wife as—as—You see she must come and live here. But are you jesting?"

"I am perfectly serious," said Mr. Oliver, rising, and taking the third copy of "Ann Ellis" from the side table, and bringing it to the fire. "She wrote this book; and when you have read it, and given me your opinion upon it, I will tell you her name."

Mr. Bat looked perplexed, and Mr. Nicholas disgusted.

"I can't wade through those three volumes, even for your sake," said the latter. "I'll take your word for their merit, as I've done before.

You know I often say 'a good book—a very good book!' to people who will bore me about books, upon your authority. The 'Times' is more than I can manage, and I've almost given up Izaak Walton."

"I'll read the book if you'll tell me about the author first," said Mr. Bat, opening the title-page. "'E. E.' 'To my Father.' Why that's Ellen Eagles! You are not going to take me in in this way?"

"How sharp you are, brother. If it *were* Ellen, what should you say?"

"I don't know. She's better than most girls, I think; and I am pretty sure that you were fond of her years ago."

"But she has no money," said Mr. Oliver.

"Never mind money," said Mr. Nicholas. "We've plenty, and it will all be yours. If you love her, and she loves you, marry her: but take care that it is mutual, my boy, mutual."

"He's only joking, Nick. Why, you don't know Oliver yet," said Mr. Bat.

"But seriously, brother," said Mr. Oliver, "what do you think of Ellen Eagles? Of course I'm joking, as you say."

"I'm very fond of poor Ellen, and have a sin-

cere respect and pity for her. I don't believe a word of the gossip of those old women at Yeo, and wish she was respectably married with all my heart."

"To me?"

"Yes, to you, if you both liked it: only I should like the gossip cleared away under those circumstances."

"And you, Nicholas?"

"I'm afraid she's hot-tempered; and I can't endure a hot-tempered woman, or one who talks fast, like cousin Love."

"But it is soon over; and I have read Shakspeare's 'Taming the Shrew,' and shall know how to manage."

"Did that girl really write this book?" said Mr. Bat, turning over the leaves.

"She did."

"Where did she find time and paper? I never knew a real author before; I shall be afraid of her."

"But you will give your consent?"

"Yes, certainly; if you are in earnest."

"You must not say one word to any person about the book or its author till I give you leave. Will you promise?"

"Yes."

"Then I may as well tell you that I have really proposed for Ellen, and been accepted this very day."

"I wish you joy with all my heart, my dear boy," said Mr. Bat, getting up to shake hands with Oliver.

"And so do I, I'm sure. God bless you, Nol," said Mr. Nicholas, following his brother's example in the hand-shaking. "I hope she won't mind my shooting dress and dirty boots in the daytime. You know I don't know much of her."

"She can't be neater than Oliver," said Mr. Bat. "Let's drink her health, Nick. We'll have a bottle of that old port on purpose."

He rang the bell, and in due course a crusted bottle of port was brought from the cellar, uncorked, and—emptied. Mr. Oliver joined with a will, and before they had drunk the last glass declared that he should like to dance a Scotch reel with his brothers.

"You'll excuse my reading her book to-night, Nol," said Mr. Bat, as he was going to bed.

"And my reading it at all," said Mr. Nicholas.

"As you like, brothers, provided you love her as my wife, and your sister."

"It will be her own fault if we don't. God bless you, old boy! You're a good contrast, at any rate. She's as black as a raven, and you're as red as a fox. Good night."

CHAPTER V.

ELLEN'S TRIUMPH.

About a week after Mr. Oliver Bat's proposal, there was an evening party at the vicarage, to which, contrary to his usual custom, that gentleman went. He avowedly disliked evening parties, so his accepting an invitation to one was considered as a peculiar honour.

The guests, who assembled at about seven o'clock, were the whole family of Loves,—Robert being at home upon leave,—the three Miss Daws, Sir John Nux, who had just come down into the country for the partridge shooting,—his architect, Mr. Horsefall, Mr. Perch, the doctor, and to the general astonishment, Miss Kern Lyons.

That young lady had been at home only a few days, and fully intended to leave again shortly, if she could obtain her father's permission to

accompany Lady Nux to Italy, whither she meant to return in about a month. Mr. and Miss Raven had heard Sir John Nux say so much of the accomplishments of Kern, and of her success in London society, that they had called on her, and invited her to their *soirée*. Mr. Raven's eldest daughter was now a young lady of nearly sixteen years of age, and made one of the party.

It was worth something to see Kern Lyons amongst all these people who considered her their inferior. Certainly her manners were perfect. When she entered the room, in which the village côterie were already assembled, awaiting the advent of the county dons, she distributed her hand-shakings and bows just as she ought to have done. She assumed no undue familiarity with those magnates, the Daws and Loves, and allowed the young men to come to her before she displayed much visible consciousness of their presence. Truly she held her own, and Miss Daw was heard to say that she was "certainly a very well-conducted young woman, and did Lady Nux's judgment credit."

Her dress was made by Lady Nux's Paris artiste, and was faultless in shape and fashion. The pale pink became her delicate complexion,

and the one blush-rose at the side of her head suited the exquisitely shaded white and pink of her slightly flushed cheeks.

It was a fact hard to acknowledge by women, still a fact, that all must acknowledge, or be at once set down as jealous-headed females—that Kern Lyons was one of the handsomest, most elegant, most refined-looking, most perfectly well-mannered girls that any one, either male or female, had ever met. People asked one another where she acquired all these gifts, and the only satisfactory answer any one could give, was, that they must spring from that drop of good blood in the Lyons' family, that still trickled through it from generation to generation, and now took up its permanent abode in her veins.

"Blood was blood after all!" said Miss Daw, as she looked at Kern.

"So it is!" said Miss Ann.

"But where was it in the last generation?" asked the malicious Mr. Oliver. "I suppose it was stagnant in her father and his brother. Or else, like insanity, it passes over a generation."

These remarks were being made when Kern was asked to play, and had politely refused to do so until Miss Love had performed.

"She knows her place, Aunt Margery, doesn't she, Aunt Anne," whispered Mrs. Love, "if Sir John doesn't. I wonder at his asking her before Margaret Anne."

Margaret Anne played and sang very nicely, and Kern stood by the piano and applauded, and turned over the leaves with perfect composure. Was she or was she not conscious that every pair of eyes in that drawing-room was fixed on her?

When Margaret Anne had finished, Sir John again urged them to play.

"Perhaps Miss Raven, or Miss Mary Raven will kindly play first," said Kern, turning to Miss Raven, who stood near her.

"Mary, will you play a duet?" said Miss Raven to her niece, and the trembling young girl did as she was bid.

"How capricious you are!" whispered Sir John to Kern, who either did not, or would not hear him.

Still she industriously turned over the leaves of a duet consisting of airs from Norma, which the Misses Raven performed respectably but nervously, for the aunt was almost as timid as the niece.

When it was over Kern asked Miss Raven if

she had seen Grisi in Norma, and this question drew forth a rapturous eulogium of that great actress and singer from the young men, in which Kern moderately joined. She never went into extremes.

"By Jove! that is acting!" said Bullying Bob, now Lieutenant Love of the — Foot. Why, it would make the cap fly off your head, Aunt Margery. 'Pon my soul it would."

"Do you remember her that last night of the season, Miss Lyons?" asked Sir John. "It certainly was magnificent."

"Very fine," said Kern, suddenly perceiving that they were engrossing the conversation, and turning to answer a question put her by Miss Love, concerning some of the songs from Norma.

"Miss Lyons sings all the opera," said Sir John, resolved to bring Kern out.

Everybody joined in asking for one of them, and then Kern yielded at once. There was neither pretension nor shyness in her manner of sitting down to the piano—nothing that any one of the lookers-on could lay hold of against her.

Kern had not taken lessons from the first Italian masters for one twelvemonth in vain. She had made the most of her opportunities.

She was a good imitatress of style and accent, and had caught the meaning as well as the manner of the songs she sang. Her voice was nothing wonderful, but yet her singing was thoroughly good. When she sang even Captain Love ceased his debate with Mr. Raven to listen to her, and as to Sir John Nux, he never moved his eyes from her face during the whole song, and young Love stood with folded arms gazing upon her.

"How can she sing, Aunt Margery, with all those men looking at her?" asked Mrs. Love, *sotto voce*. "I don't think Margaret Anne could ever do that. I don't like Italian, do you, Aunt Ann, though to be sure she sings it like a real opera singer. Only think of that being Kern Lyons, Job Lyons' daughter, sister of that Mrs. Low and all those young Lyons! Why one can't believe one's ears or eyes."

"Hush!" said a voice from the piano, and the whisper became audible, and Mrs. Love was silent at the command of the potent Sir John.

"I'd as soon hear you sing that as Grisi, 'pon my soul I had," said Lieutenant Love, when Kern finished. "There, mother, what d'ye think of that for London! You ought to let Margaret Anne go up for a few lessons."

"Oh! Miss Love sings so very well," said Kern, "and there is nothing like an English ballad."

"Except an Italian *canzona*," said Sir John, in an under tone.

Beauty and music were his world. He existed in no other.

Miss Daw actually rose from her seat at the end of the room, and walked majestically across towards the piano.

"What's the matter, I wonder!" said Lieutenant Love. "If here isn't aunt, with her cap still on her head, coming straight to you, Miss Lyons."

"A case of Orpheus and the stones!" said Mr. Oliver, who, like the rest, found himself within Kern's circle.

Miss Margery walked up to Kern, whilst her amiable nephew was making pantomimic faces behind her.

"Miss Kerenhappuch Lyons!" she began.

Kern rose, neither embarrassed by the honour nor the name, and offered her chair to Miss Daw.

"Thank you, I prefer standing. I am sure we are much indebted to you for your admirable rendering of that fine operatic air."

"I am sure we are," said Miss Ann, who had followed her sister.

"I am delighted to have given you any pleasure," said Kern.

The two maiden ladies were, as usual, dressed precisely alike. They wore black satin gowns, of tight fit, and ancient make, though the material was new and handsome; immense fan-like caps, elaborately trimmed with white satin ribbon, and large grey scarfs.

As the graceful Kern stood before them, half a head taller than either, and they were women of a good height, they made such a striking contrast, that everybody looked at them, and the bystanders listened to their conversation, and joined in it.

"Do you sing French songs as well as Italian?" asked Miss Margery.

"I have a few," was the reply.

"Do you know that beautiful air, *Portrait charmant?*"

"A beautiful air!" said Miss Ann.

"*Portrait de mon ami,*" broke in Mr. Oliver, with a smile.

"Precisely—exactly," said Miss Margery.

"Exactly!" echoed Miss Ann.

"I do not think I ever heard it," replied Kern.

"Perhaps your great-grandmother did," muttered Bob.

"I think you learnt music of that young woman, Miss Eagles," said Miss Margery.

"I did until I went to London."

"A capital mistress she is!" said Mr. Raven.

"Margaret Anne used to learn of her, but we felt compelled to give her up," said Mrs. Love.

"Why?" asked Mr. Oliver, quietly.

"Those are points not to be discussed in public," said Miss Margery, majestically.

"Not in public," said Miss Ann.

"What do you consider points proper for public discussion?" asked Mr. Oliver.

"The points of the compass, and the points of a fine woman," said Captain Love. "Isn't that it, Aunt Daw?"

"I should think literature was a pretty subject for a party such as this," said Miss Margery.

"Certainly, literature," said Miss Ann.

"Tiresome old women!" murmured Sir John, walking off to the piano, and turning over the music.

"You are quite right," said Mr. Oliver; "that book I lent you, for instance. What do you

think of it? Come,—I can have all the opinions at once."

"It is the most delightful book I ever read in my life," said Margaret Anne, enthusiastically. "Oh! do tell us who the author is, Mr. Oliver."

"Very clever, very clever," growled Captain Love, who always found that his voice became deep when he was engaged in criticism. "A practised hand. I saw a capital review of it in the 'Athenæum;' and I can tell you that the 'Dorset Director' will have a first-rate one to-morrow."

Mr. Oliver's eyes twinkled under his spectacles.

"Ah! you wrote the 'review,' I understand. But reviewers are like spirits, and only appear to the few. I am sure that the author of 'Ann Ellis' will have reason to bless the name of Love."

The Captain nodded affirmatively.

"Ann Ellis!" said Kern. "Everybody was running after a new book of that name, in London, and Lady Nux tried for it at several libraries, but it was already in such request that she had not yet been able to get it."

Mr. Oliver's eyes twinkled more and more.

"And you, Miss Daw; what do you think of it?"

"I cannot say that I altogether like the style, It is a highly moral work, and of unquestionable merit, but very different from Miss Porter's admirable works, in which historical lore is so sweetly blended with fiction, that you learn history whilst you read."

"A dose of jalap in currant jam," said Mr. Oliver.

"Sweetly blended!" said Miss Ann.

"I could make neither head nor tail of 'Ann Ellis,'" said Mrs. Love. "She isn't a bit like any other heroine I ever read of. She isn't either a beauty or a perfect character, or a mysterious girl, or a persecuted woman, or anything in short, like the 'Mysteries of Udolpho,' or 'The Children of the Abbey,' or any of the pretty fashionable novels of the present day; only a commonplace sort of girl, with an old father, and an old lover, and——"

"My dear, you don't understand," said Captain Love. "As the 'Athenæum' justly observes, those things are the merits of the book."

"I am glad to see such a book with so high a religious tone running through it," said Mr. Raven. "It may do some good whilst it amuses."

"Perhaps you will lend it to me that I may

have something to say about it," said Sir John. "Of all things on earth the dullest is to hear a book discussed that you haven't read."

"I beg your pardon, I am sure, Sir John," said Miss Raven, "you would like some more music."

"Oh, I didn't mean to imply that we were dull here," laughed Sir John, "though music *is* the very height of enjoyment."

"And you all think," persisted Mr. Oliver, "that 'Ann Ellis' must be written, at least, by a person of strict moral principles, and religious feeling."

"Unquestionably," said Miss Margery.

"Decidedly," said Miss Ann.

"No one could doubt it," said Captain Love.

"A clergyman, I should say," said Miss Raven.

"The clergy are no better than other people," said the Ensign. "Anybody could write a fine book."

"Anybody couldn't write 'Ann Ellis,'" said Mr. Raven. "Mary and I are at issue about the sex of the writer. I say, a woman; she says a man."

"Bother!" said Bob Love. "Do you like this

talk, Miss Kern? Don't you long to be in London, instead of in this stupid place? I shouldn't be here if it wasn't for you."

This was said aside to Kern, who professed not to hear.

"Do sing 'Mira Norma,'" said Sir John, on the other side.

Kern listened to the discussion, and said, "By-and-by, Sir John," at the same time.

"I am sure you know something of the author, Mr. Oliver," said Miss Love. "Do tell us who it is."

"I have heard a little history of the author, which interested me very much," said Mr. Oliver. "I believe I may be permitted to tell it."

Everybody listened, and only Lieutenant Love ventured to say, "I hope it isn't long, for we want some more music, or something."

"Not long; don't be afraid, Bob, Miss Kern will sing again directly. I see you have good taste."

Mrs. Love frowned.

"But the story, Mr. Oliver?" said little Mary Raven.

"Well, Mary, you shall have it. The author of this book, now making a great sensation in the

world of letters, was poor, and obliged to work hard for his bread."

"It is a man, then!" said Miss Love.

"I said so," said Miss Raven.

"I shall not reveal the sex, but I choose to say he, because we males have that small advantage over the ladies, and get the benefit of the doubt. The author was determined to write a book, in order to see whether literature might mend his fortune. He was proud, or vain enough not to wish his name to be known if his book was a failure, and anxious to surprise some dear relations and friends with it, if it proved successful, so he wrote anonymously. He had previously been the object of some envy in his neighbourhood, and of much scorn and censure; and perhaps a desire to triumph over the people who lorded it over him was also at the bottom of this wish.

"At any rate, he wrote his book, sent it to a publisher's, had it printed and published, without acquainting any one with its existence but one friend in London. This took some three or four years to accomplish, for the author was without interest.

"Meanwhile a scandal arose—nobody knew how, and for which no one could lay a firm

foundation—connected with the sending to and fro to publishers the MS. of this work, and some previous articles for magazines. This grew, as scandal does, from a dwarf to a giant—from a Lilliputian to a Brobdignagian. It matters not what it was, exactly, but it ruined the author's prospects, alienated his few friends, soured his temper, undermined his health, and brought white hairs before their time."

"Shame! shame!" exclaimed several of Mr. Oliver Bat's audience, all of whom were now interested in his narrative.

"You think it was cruel, don't you?" he asked, whilst his cheeks grew every moment redder and redder, and his eyes sharper and quicker. "So do I. But it is an every-day story. We all help to make such. However, our author did not die. He had, or will have, his full triumph in the applause of the world; though I am afraid that doesn't compensate for the weight of four years or more of neglect and calumny."

"Of course it does not," said Miss Daw. "But he might have cleared himself. Why didn't he?"

"Pride, my good lady, pride! We all have the monster;—some of family, some of fortune, some of our author's peculiar kind."

"And shall we know who it is?" asked Miss Love.

"Who cares?" said Bob. "He must have been a great fool."

"A most interesting person, I am sure," said Miss Harriet Daw; "and I pity him from my heart."

"I hope he'll marry some grand person now, and be very happy," said Mary.

"I hope he will marry, and be very happy, Mary," said Mr. Oliver. "But now for the moral of my tale, and then, Miss Kern, for the music.—Before we speak ill of our neighbours we should, at least, be sure of what we are speaking about. Ladies, that is a little hint for you. Now, Miss Kern, some music."

"If you will tell us the name and sex of the author, I will sing and play as long as you like," said Kern.

"And whether he is really going to be married?" said Mary Raven.

"If you will sing and play first, I will even tell you his name before I go away."

Kern went to the piano, to the great delight of Sir John, and Captain Love and Mr. Raven settled down to chess.

The Miss Daws and Mrs. Love discussed Mr. Oliver's story, and that gentleman chuckled inwardly over his own little joke.

When Kern had sung as much as she thought expedient she rose from the piano, in spite of the entreaties of Sir John, who never could have music enough.

"Well, Kern, you have astonished the natives to-night," said Bob. "Now do come and play at bagatelle, and be my partner."

Kern waited to be asked by Miss Raven, and went, but not as Bob's partner, but Mr. Oliver Bat's.

"What business has he with you?" growled Bob, looking fiercely over his growing moustache.

Bob wouldn't play at all, and stood at a distance, watching Kern's graceful movements. Sir John and Miss Love were partners on the opposite side, to the evident delight of papa and mamma.

Still everybody looked at Kern; it was impossible to help it. Once she caught Bob's ferocious glance, and the satirical movement of the mouth we have once before observed, was visible; but this was the only perceptible symptom of

Kern's being occupied with anything but her game; and nobody but Mr. Oliver, who saw everything, remarked that.

"You are a capital hand, Miss Kern," said he, as Kern put ball after ball into the holes. "You could play billiards."

"Miss Lyons can do everything," said Sir John.

"Flattery is an easy art to learn," said Kern, quietly, sending in another ball.

"I hope we shall be partners again," said Mr. Oliver.

"You always manage to get hold of the young ladies," growled Bob.

"He shows his good taste," said Sir John; "particularly on the present occasion."

The evening went on as evening parties do, and came to an end by the announcement of supper. Of course Sir John was too well bred to take Kern into the dining-room, but offered his arm to Miss Daw, so Kern fell to Bob, or rather he managed to get her. He was boisterous in his mirth and attentions; but she received both with such perfect *nonchalance*, that Mrs. Love looked on astonished.

When supper was over they returned to the

drawing-room, and, at the earnest entreaty of Sir John and Mr. Raven, Kern sang one more song. Whilst she was singing, Mr. Oliver rang quietly for his horse. Mary Raven heard him give the order, and when the servant said that his horse was ready, she went to him, and forcibly detained him till the song was done.

"Miss Kern Lyons! Miss Lyons!" she exclaimed, whilst Kern was receiving an ovation. "Come here, if you please. Mr. Oliver Bat is going without keeping his promise."

Kern walked towards the door where the playful struggle was going on, and reminded Mr. Oliver that she had only sung first, on condition that he should tell them the name of the author.

"And I want to know if he is really to marry, and be happy after all that trouble," said Mary.

"If you will both come into that corner with me, where nobody else will hear, I will tell you," said Mr. Oliver. "One at a time. Now Miss Kern."

To the general amusement, Kern went, as if it was the simplest thing in the world.

"Now you are not to tell till I am gone who the author is, Miss Kern," said Mr. Oliver aloud.

"Very well," said Kern, "I promise."

"The author of 'Ann Ellis' is your friend and mistress, Ellen Eagles," whispered Mr. Oliver, so that nobody could hear but Kern.

Kern's colour heightened, and a look of doubt and surprise shook her calm self-possession for a moment.

"Now, Mary; it is your turn. Come and spell 'opportunity' with me."

Mary looked almost nervous as she took Kern's place in the corner.

"You are not to tell till I am gone, remember."

Mary nodded.

"The author is going to marry me as soon as I can get her to name the day, and I hope she will be very happy," whispered Mr. Oliver.

"Nonsense! Now you are only joking!" laughed little Mary.

Mr. Oliver wished his friends good night, and when they heard his horse trotting down the road, they called upon Kern and Mary for their secrets.

"It is like a game of forfeits," said Miss Harriet Daw.

"Now, Miss Kern," said Mr. Raven. "We are all attention and anxiety."

Kern's face really displayed some inward perturbation; and no wonder, for she did not know how her listeners would receive the news.

"I scarcely think Mr. Bat has told the truth," said Kern. "He means to take us in. He says the author is Miss Eagles."

"Oh! it is all a joke!" cried little Mary. "He says he is going to marry her himself as soon as she will name the day, and he hopes she will be very happy. I am sure I wish it was true."

Had the unexpected news of Mr. Oliver Bat's sudden death been announced, a more awe-struck party could not have received it.

"It's all a hoax!" cried Bob. "Old Nol's fond of that sort of thing. He wants to frighten me into being civil to him, because we're the next heirs."

"If it is true, I shall never notice them again!" said Miss Daw, solemnly.

"Never again!" echoed Miss Ann.

"If it's true, there'll be some trouble for you women to make up matters," growled Captain Love. "You've spoken pretty openly, and Oliver Bat has treasured it all up, I'll be bound. He's a queer fish—a regular old shark."

"Ellen Eagles write that book! Stuff o' nonsense," said Mrs. Love, whose face was redder than a peony; "you might as well believe Margaret Anne wrote it. And then as to Oliver's marrying such a woman,—a nobody, and a nobody's daughter—why, I am sure I don't believe it, any more than Aunt Margery or Aunt Ann."

"I believe she is quite equal to writing it," said Kern, quietly.

"And now I think of it, Oliver was always talking of her," said Miss Harriet. "Do you remember, sisters, at the school-feast."

"I remember nothing connected with that young woman," said Miss Daw. "But it is getting late, we must go."

Miss Raven took the ladies to a bedroom to put on all sorts of hoods and shawls.

"It is iniquitous, horrible, sly," began Mrs. Love. "And he as good as promised to make Bob his heir. And so fond of Margaret Anne!"

"Oh, mamma! he was too old for me, I'm sure!"

"Poor Miss Eagles!" murmured Miss Raven. "If it is true, what a triumph for her!"

"She is quite able to appreciate it," said Kern, silently enjoying the feminine comments.

Captain Love awaited his family, and during their short walk homewards, his wrath exploded. He knew Oliver Bat well enough, and it was all the result of women's tongues.

The Misses Daw maintained a majestic silence upon the subject to Sir John Nux, the Lieutenant, and Kern, who all walked up the village together with two female servants at a proper distance behind them. When Kern bade the ladies good night, they all graciously allowed her to touch the tips of their fingers, and asked her to call upon them. The gentlemen accompanied her to the gate of her home, each wishing the other farther, and one of the two servants followed.

"Do you think it's true?" asked Sir John. "She's a forbidding-looking person; but I suppose those are the sort of women who write books."

"I am thinking of writing a book," said Kern.

"Yes. I feel sure it is true, and should rejoice in such a triumph as awaits Miss Eagles. Good-night, Sir John."

Sir John turned away, but Bob lingered a moment.

"I say now, Kern. Why did you treat me so

to-night? You know none of 'em cares for you as I do."

"I am not aware that I treated you differently from the rest."

"No, that's it. You pretend one thing and do another."

"Good-night, Mr. Love," said Kern, and disappeared.

CHAPTER VI.

THE PRODIGAL'S RETURN.

Again the stage coach, with its four prancing horses, stops at the Royal Oak. Seven or eight years have passed over that goodly inn since first we saw it, but landlord and landlady, ostler and waiter, are unchanged. The same coachman drinks his dram in the bar; the same guard takes his fee from the passengers: but their journey is shortened to some twenty or thirty miles, instead of a hundred and more, for railroads have made rapid strides in these eight years, and coaches, coachmen, and guards have begun to die away from the face of the earth.

It is a dull November afternoon. Five o'clock strikes in the inn kitchen. Lamps are lighted on the coach: lamps are lighted on a carriage at no great distance from it, and the ostler carries a

lantern and the landlord a candle to make darkness visible.

"Any gen'lemen for Yeo?" shouts a voice from the neighbourhood of the carriage.

"Yes," from two voices at once.

"This way, please gen'lemen. The horses won't stan' still."

"Let me light you, gentlemen," says the landlord; "any luggage?"

"I have mine in my hand," answers one.

"Here's the other gen'leman's portmanteau," cries the guard, pulling a large box from the boot, and giving it to the landlord.

Shortly the two gentlemen thus addressed are seated in a comfortable close carriage, and looking at one another by the light of the lamps.

"Do you object to having both windows up?" asks one; "this abominable fog kills me."

The other answered by closing his window.

"We must have travelled together from Dorchester, I suppose," said the first speaker.

"Yes, from London," answered his companion. "I saw you on the platform, but you travelled first, I second class: you went inside and I out, on the coach, so we did not fall together."

"You are going to the Downs Lodge, I suppose?"

"No; to the Manor Farm."

"Oh! Still this is Mr. Bat's carriage, is it not?"

"Yes; he was kind enough to say it should meet me."

"And the—you know the Bats?"

"Slightly."

"Confound this fog. The atmosphere of this country pierces glass and everything else. I wish I were out of it."

A fit of coughing interrupted further conversation, and neither of the travellers spoke again until the carriage pulled up at the gate of the Manor Farm, and once more deposited Lachlan Lyons at his uncle's threshold.

"Good night. You will excuse my taciturnity. Many things press on my mind," said the gentleman in the carriage.

"Certainly," said Lachlan, turning to shake hands with his uncle, kiss his Cousin Kezia, answer the boisterous "how d'ye do, cousin" of the younger branches, and enter the house he had come to first a boy of sixteen and returned to a young man of three-and-twenty.

"Well, Lachlan, I'm sure I'm as glad to see you almost as if 'twas Matthew come home," said Mrs. Lyons, returning Lachlan's hearty salute. "Law, Kern, why don't you kiss your cousin! he's like your own brother. But your fine London manners are quite different from ours. Thank you, Lachlan, I'm very ailing still. I only wonder I'm alive with one thing and another."

"Why, aunt, you look better than when I left. And is this little Rhoda? And these great fat fellows the twins? I left Luke as well and happy as a prince, and Dr. and Mrs. Dove as proud of him as possible."

"Ah! they're all going away. We shall have nobody soon. There's Matthew and Mark and Mima married, and Kern wanting to go to Italy, and——"

"How are George and Mima, aunt?"

"Here we are to answer for ourselves, lad," cried a voice from behind, and George Low came into the hall, with a huge boy in his arms, and Mima at his heels.

"Why, I'm almost ashamed to be kissed by such a great tall fellow," laughed Jemima.

"I never was so glad to see anybody in all my

life," said George, nearly wringing Lachlan's hand off. "Look at our boy."

"Well, he is a noble little chap," said Lachlan, taking George junior into his arms.

"You shall see the girl to-morrow," said Mima. "We were afraid to bring her to-night."

"A chip of the old block, nephew," said Mr. Lyons. "The little maid makes up our baker's dozen. Thirteen now, altogether."

"Three as good as lost," moaned Mrs. Lyons. "Now, Lachlan, which is Jacob and which is Esau?"

Lachlan looked puzzled.

"I'm Jacob," roared a stout little fellow.

"And I'm Rhoda, cousin," said a little girl of nine, putting up her face to be kissed.

"Come? eh!" said a voice from the doorway, followed by a cloud of tobacco-smoke.

"Let me pass, Squoire, you're so slow," said another; and farmers Bull and Low made their appearance.

"Welcome home, my boy," said Mr. Bull; "see how glad we all are to see you now you're getting on in the world. Dost remember when I put thee down at the door the first time thee'st come to these parts?"

"Grown, turmenjous!" said farmer Low; opening his eyes wider than usual.

"I should think so!" said farmer Bull. "We shall all be proud enough of 'ee now."

"Cousin must want his tea," said Kezia, "and to warm himself."

"I should think he was warm enough," said Kern, "with ten people pressing round him at once."

"A warm welcome's a good thing, Miss Kern," said Mr. Bull.

"Thank you all for it from my heart," said Lachlan, giving his eyes a very hard rub with the back of his hand.

"Why, Kern, you didn't tell us that Lachlan was half as tall or good-looking as he is. He's very like father," said Mima.

"Perhaps I didn't think him good-looking," said Kern.

"I never get a compliment from Kern, Cousin Mima," said Lachlan.

"Oh, nothing but dukes and lords with names worse than the capital cities 'll do for Kern," said George.

"Grand!" muttered the Squoire," who ha already taken his place in the chimney-corner.

"There's baking-cakes and carraway bread, and crumpets made with cream for tea," said Esau.

"And such a pie for supper!" said Jacob. "I saw Kezia making it."

Here Luke made his appearance for the first time. He was a fine handsome lad of seventeen now, very much in love with Aline, so Kern said.

He and Lachlan complimented one another on their increased size, and then they all sat down to tea, a goodly family party.

"So you were in the secret of the book, Lachlan," said Kern. "How sly of you to keep it so quiet."

"It is a great success," said Lachlan. "I feel almost as proud as if I had written it myself."

"That is why you are honoured with an invitation to the wedding," said Kern. "How did you manage to tear yourself from that Lyons' den of yours?"

"I am come for a whole week," said Lachlan.

"Mind, you are all engaged to the Downs Farm to-morrow, after it is all over," said Mr. Bull. "Grandmother expects every one. It is a party for Lachlan."

"Who are the bridesmaids, Kern?" asked Lachlan.

"Eye to the sex!" said the Squoire from the corner.

"Aline and I are to be the bridesmaids," said Kern.

"All dressed in white, and cherry-coloured ribbons and flowers," said Rhoda. "Show your dress to cousin, Kern."

"To-morrow will be soon enough for that," said Kern. "We shall be sufficiently brilliant then."

"I hope there are to be no strangers," said Lachlan. "But I suppose the gentleman who came with me from the Royal Oak must be a friend of Mr. Bat's. He got into the carriage as if he knew it was waiting for him."

"From London?" said Kern, with awakened curiosity.

"Yes. A tall, dark, handsome, foreign-looking man. I saw him once with Mr. Oliver Bat at the Royal Academy."

"Fancy Ellen Eagles Mrs. Oliver Bat, and driving in her carriage and pair," said Mr. Lyons. "Some people are born with silver spoons in their mouths, while others are obliged to go

on slaving from the very moment they come into the world. I declare I think it's very unfair."

"Who cut your hair and made your coat, Lachlan?" asked Kern.

"I cut my own hair as you wouldn't do it for me, and a friend of Stern's, a poor tailor with a dozen children, made my coat."

"I thought so. I am sure you will set the fashion at Yeo. And the wedding-coat was turned out by the same accomplished hand?"

"Yes."

"What's the odds, Kern?" said George. "He's better in his coat than all your grandees in theirs. How's Stern, cousin?"

"Very well. He would have come with me but he couldn't be spared."

"Do eat and drink and hold your tongue, nephew," said Mr. Lyons. "Kern, let your cousin alone."

"I'm not touching him, father; but I really do feel an interest in his appearance to-morrow."

"Perhaps you'll cut me again, if I don't look a beau?" said Lachlan, glancing at Kern.

Kern coloured.

"How are Madam and Miss Rambully, Mr. Bull?" said Lachlan.

"Call me grandfather as you used, you rascal. They're pretty well; Madam's queerish, as usual, Miss is as—but I won't say. You shall judge for yourself to-morrow."

"She's beautiful! She's divine!" said Luke, as he was putting a piece of crumpet into his mouth.

"And Mrs. Fluke?" asked Lachlan.

"Ask the Squoire," said Mr. Bull.

"Prudent woman!" puffed the Squoire.

"Don't put such nonsense into father-law's head," said Jemima.

"And how are all my maternal relatives?"

"Ask Kern," said Luke. "She's in high favour."

"I shall quite cut you out, Lachlan. I have literally been to tea at Captain Love's, and at the 'Rookery.'"

"Haw, haw, haw!" roared George. "Do you remember that old Daw in her night-gown?"

There was a general laugh.

"Dear, yes," said Mrs. Lyons, not a little proud, "Kern's asked everywhere now. That's what it is to have been to sister Dove's! Only

if she wouldn't persist in going to foreign parts, and I so sickly. I may be dead before she comes back."

"Do be quiet, Rhoda," said Mr. Lyons. "You always spoil our pleasure by your complaints."

"Well, Job, I'm sure it isn't you as should say so."

"Now shut up, mother-law," said George. "And, Lachlan, Bullying Bob's after Kern! There's a fine sweetheart for 'ee."

"George, how low you are," said Kern.

"Name and natur," said the Squoire.

Tea over, they all gathered round the chimney-corner, just as they did on the evening when Lachlan first saw his relations. He and Kern again were side by side, and the flames from the blazing logs flickered across their faces. Jacob was on Lachlan's knee, Esau at his feet, Rhoda behind his back, Mima had her boy asleep in her arms, and her worthy husband by her side. The elders had their pipes as usual, and Mrs. Lyons was soon dozing in her chair.

"Tell us about your life on the railway, cousin," said Luke.

"I'm sure I never wished you to go for a navvy, nephew," said Mrs. Lyons. "They all

blamed me for it, and I thought I should never hear the last of it when you were lost, or get a wink of sleep at night. It was nearly the death of me."

"I'm very sorry, aunt, but it was the making of me," said Lachlan; "and I have some hope that Mr. Markman may give me a post on the branch line from Dorchester, that is to go by the Royal Oak, and then I shall make up for lost time and see plenty of you."

"Capital!" cried half a dozen voices at once.

"If the Bill passes he will have the line, and by that time I should be able to be one of the engineers."

"Then you are getting on, nephew," said Mr. Lyons.

"I cannot help it, uncle, for Mr. Markman gives me every opportunity. I have plenty of practice, and I find my hard work, as navvy, turn to account in many ways: so, you see, aunt, if it was your fault, what good you did me. How is the old museum, uncle?"

"Kern has been looking after it since she came back. By the way, that reminds me of Yeo. Where is the poor fellow? Why didn't you bring him?"

"He is with Stern. He would have been too expensive a companion by rail."

"Does aunt ever give any parties now?" asked Kern.

"I think all the gaiety vanished with you, cousin. But you have brought it here. What did the Miss Daws do to you?"

"They gave me tea and cake in the best drawing-room, and the agreeable company of their relations, the Loves."

"What did you talk about?"

"Principally about Miss Eagles and her marriage. I assure you the conversation was quite edifying enough for you. They were all very sorry to find that Miss Eagles was not exactly what their 'fancy had painted her,' and considered her a very forward person to dare to marry Mr. Bat."

"Did you agree?"

"Of course I did."

"Why you know, Kern," said Luke, "you mean to marry Bob, if he'll have you."

"Really?"

"If she does she shan't be my sister-law," said George.

"Baronet—Sir John!" puffed the Squoire, who always saw everything.

"I should like to know who the gentleman is that you travelled with," said Kern.

So, perhaps, would the reader; and it is high time for us to leave the cheerful chimney-corner of the Manor, with its happy circle of kindred, and its huge, flaming, flickering, glowing fire, and follow the stranger in Mr. Bat's carriage to his destination, the Nest.

When the carriage arrived at the little gate at the end of the lane, it was met by Mr. Oliver Bat.

"Is the gentleman come, George?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Put up the horses at the inn, and come for me at ten o'clock."

By this time the traveller was out of the carriage, and shaking hands with Mr. Oliver Bat.

"They expect me?" he asked.

"No: it is a surprise. Besides, you did not promise to come."

"It is very foolish, but I tremble so much I can scarcely walk."

"Nonsense. Come along."

They went to the house.

Mr. Oliver went first into the parlour, saying—

"Now, Ellen, I deserve your faithful per-

formance of the 'love, honour, and obey.' You would have no jewels, you said, so I have brought you a rough diamond. Don't be frightened, either of you. It is William!"

The long-lost son and brother was in the room. Mr. Oliver Bat left it.

Of the pathos of those tears, and that embrace, who shall speak? Returned after nearly twenty years of absence! Can words paint such a reunion as this?

All that the son can utter is, "Father, forgive me." All the father can do is, to turn away and weep.

"Brother, brother," cried Ellen, throwing her arms round him, and in turn encircled by his arms.

Meanwhile Mr. Oliver Bat was stamping up and down the little dining-parlour.

"I wonder whether it is all over," he muttered to himself. "They are such an impulsive, fiery race, those Eagles. One expects all sorts of excesses. Ellen must tame into a Bat. No wonder she hates to change her name. From gazing at the sun to come down to night! poor child. I must go in: she may be in hysterics again."

"Have you played the play out?" he said, as

he entered the other room. "Now isn't he a rough diamond, Ellen? Did you ever see such a regular foreigner?"

William Eagles was a thin, tall, dark, sallow man, with restless black eyes, something like Ellen's, but less expressive of purpose and energy. His features were so sharp that cutting words and cutting thoughts must belong to their owner. He had thin, bloodless lips, which parted a very thick and bushy black beard, and were parted by teeth so white that they frightened you almost as much as those of the wolf did little Red Riding Hood. His hair was black, and carefully brushed over a large bald patch at the back of a head in which the organs of benevolence and veneration were sadly deficient, but in which the phrenologist might see self-esteem predominant.

A handsome, strange, ghastly face it was, yet full of that peculiar interest that makes you look at it by stealth, wonder at it, and then turn away and ponder over it.

Mr. Eagles looked at him, covered his eyes with his hands, murmured a few words of thanksgiving, and then said aloud, in the emphatic language of Scripture, "This my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost and is found."

"Truly a prodigal, father," said the son. "Tired of the husks of the world—tired of life."

"I beg to say that this is the eve of a marriage feast," broke in Mr. Oliver; "and we must be cheerful. Ellen, dry your eyes, and give William some——"

"Not tea. I hate tea."

Ellen kissed her brother's forehead, and left the room.

Supper was soon ready—tea and supper combined. But how different the appetite and enjoyment of the *blasé* man of the world from those of his late travelling companion at the farm!

He ate scarcely anything, but drank freely of Mr. Bat's present of sherry.

"We must make you eat better than this, Willie," said the father. "Dorsetshire air will soon set you up."

"Yes, if all those twenty years were a dream, as they seem to be. Ellen, you are not—you cannot be—the child I left."

"As much as that you are the young man who left me, brother," said Ellen, sadly.

"Thank God that we meet thus!" said Mr. Eagles, folding his hands; "and on the eve of

so much prospective happiness to this child—our Ellen."

"The world's Ellen now," said the brother, his face kindling into something like a smile for the first time. "Ellen, you have outshone me."

"Oh, brother! all that seems as nothing at this moment."

"William, let me drink your health," said Mr. Oliver. "Mr. Eagles, you must join us, for once. Ellen, welcome the 'coming guest,' they shall speed the 'parting ones' to-morrow."

It was out of hearts overflowing with feeling, and eyes brimming over with tears, that the words and looks that welcomed the wanderer home sprung. They were solemn words.

"May God bless our re-union, and keep us from another separation!" said Mr. Eagles.

"Amen," said Ellen, quietly, bending her head, and letting the tears fall into the wine.

Mr. Oliver went to the back of her chair, and stroked her black, smooth hair, his old way of showing his affection for her.

"Ellen! my brave, noble Ellen!" he said, as he glanced at her brother, and met his eyes.

There was no reproach in the glance, but William Eagles' eyes fell beneath it. Did he

remember that the sister he had deserted when a child, had borne the burden and heat of the day, whilst he was following his own ways elsewhere? He could not help remembering it, but the recollection brought other thoughts, which irritated him.

"How cold this country is!" he said; "I have done nothing but try to cough up the November fog since I left London. I hope your church will be heated to-morrow."

This diversion dried Ellen's tears.

"The same William as ever!" she thought, and sighed.

"You must put on flannel," said Mr. Oliver. "Mr. Raven tells us that he considers the best stoves are a church lined from chancel to porch with people."

"I remember the damp, ivy-covered building. It makes one shudder to think of it. I hope your new parson is more energetic than old Mason was."

"He is a worthy, earnest man, William," said Mr. Eagles.

"Father! I never heard you use a cant word before! 'Earnest,' are we not all 'earnest' in good or evil?"

"My age, and grey hairs make me pray to be earnest in good, my son," said Mr. Eagles.

"William, you will not leave my father till I return," said Ellen.

"Where are you going, and how long are you going to stay?"

"We are going everywhere," said Mr. Oliver. "To France, Italy, Germany, Switzerland, Spain, Asia Minor, Jerusalem, and the Sandwich Islands. Ellen wants to circumnavigate the globe, she says."

"Then my father must come to London with me. I should die at Yeo. You have chosen a bad time of year."

"I would not wait. I like to do everything at once, and persuaded Ellen against her will."

"Let us go into the other room," said Ellen.

They went.

"My time is nearly up," said Mr. Oliver, looking at Ellen.

"I have one last request to make," said Mr. Eagles, almost timidly. "Will you join us this last night in prayer and thanksgiving?"

Mr. Oliver bowed a willing assent, and they knelt down for the first time, all four together, in family worship.

Very solemn was Mr. Eagles' manner—very touching and heart-searching his prayer. He

thanked his heavenly Father for restoring to him his son, and asked for his blessing on the daughter he was about to lose, and the new son he was so soon to have. He prayed that the hearts of each might be softened, and rendered more loving and gentle to the others—so that the sins and sorrows of the past might be obliterated by the repentance and joy of the present.

Much more he said, in the fulness of his heart; and when he rose from his knees, he had the satisfaction of seeing that his words had touched the feelings of his son. William Eagles was weeping. When had he ever seen him weep before?

The carriage wheels were heard.

Mr. Eagles held Mr. Oliver's hand long, as he said "God bless you!"

"She will be safe with me," said Mr. Oliver, taking Ellen's hand, and uniting it with his own and her father's.

"I know it—I am thankful," said Mr. Eagles—"Light of my eyes—joy of my heart."

"And I?" said William, drawing near. "Have you no term of endearment for me?"

Mr. Oliver drew Ellen away with him, and they left the father and son together, and the son fell upon his father's neck, and wept.

CHAPTER VII.

ELLEN AND HER BRIDESMAIDS.

People are never tired of describing, and listening to descriptions of weddings. Of course they always are, or ought to be, joyous events, and friends and neighbours naturally rejoice with the actors in them. We have seen how delighted the Yeo folk were at the grand match Ellen Eagles was about to make! Everybody had been wanting to get one of the Bats, at least, married—and now everybody was to be satisfied. From Miss Daw, down to Miss Love, all the Yeo spinsters had, at some period of their life, had an eye to the Lodge, and now Miss Eagles was to go there.

"I am thankful I am not to keep house for those three old men," said Miss Love.

"You may well say so!" said Miss Ann Daw-

And all through the country people were making similar comments.

But Ellen Eagles did not hear them, and had she heard them, she would not have heeded them. She was going to be married to the man she loved, and could very well afford to be envied or pitied.

One thing she had stoutly insisted upon, that none of her former calumniators should be asked to her wedding. She would have no one but her three pupils, and be her own hostess. Kezia was to stay and superintend the simple breakfast, and Aline and Kern were to go with her to church.

November is not the most cheerful of months, but the wedding morning was finer than most November mornings, and as it did not rain, and was not very foggy, when the young people awoke, they were well contented.

The family coach of the Bat household was sent to convey Aline and Kern, in their bridal attire, to the Nest. Kezia, the useful, went early to help to dress the bride.

The family coach waited until the three ladies came down stairs, and walked quickly through the little garden, followed by Mr. Eagles, and got into it. Ellen said that she could not trust

herself to see her father and brother before the ceremony.

Her brother and Lachlan had preceded them to the church, and at the door the former offered his arm to Aline, the latter to Kern, and followed the father and daughter to the altar, where the three Mr. Bats and Sir John Nux met them.

The little church was full of people. Of course neither Loves nor Daws were there, if we except the Lieutenant, who went to look at Kern; but Miss Raven and her nieces were amongst the spectators of the ceremony.

We may as well take up our post amongst them also, and as lookers on at a wedding will always think more of the bridal party than of the solemn service, make our remarks upon them.

Ellen looks composed and very pale. Her dark brows are as clear and open as if they had never been painfully compressed by cutting words or hard living. Her black eyes have a steady, happy lustre, unlike the fitful brilliance of a month or two ago. She looks well in her handsome but simple bridal dress, and in the eyes of Mr. Oliver, apparently, she is perfection.

Ladies! you will like to know that her dress

is of the purest white silk, and her bonnet of proper bridal fashion, with veil and orange blossoms. Mr. Oliver Bat's bride must be in no way behind other brides!

But oh! those bridesmaids! How demurely they stand behind their queen! Two bright twinkling stars near the moon. The tall, fair, graceful Diana of a Kern! the small, dark, sylph-like Hebe of an Aline!

The cherry-coloured flowers in the white bonnets, and the cherry-coloured ribbons about the white dresses, light up the little church, and the bright young faces.

Kern is self-possessed as usual, and ready to hold the glove, and to wait upon Miss Eagles, apparently quite unconscious of the gaze of many of the bystanders. Aline's face is flushed with excitement, and large tears are in her eyes ready to roll down her cheeks, as she listens, for the first time, to the marriage ceremony, and lends her whole heart to her friend, the bride.

We cannot wonder that Lachlan Lyons looks with loving interest at the young girl, who, a few years ago, as a child, was his first friend in his father's native county. He has not seen her before since he left Yeo to seek his fortune.

When first they met in the porch she shook hands with him hastily, and said, quite naturally, "How do you do, Lachlan; I am so glad to see you," and once she met his eye and smiled, before the service began; but now she thinks of nothing but the solemn vows that bind two human beings together till "death them doth part."

The elder Mr. Bats look very cheerfully at their future sister-in-law, and Sir John Nux looks very admiringly from her to her bridesmaids, and from them to her again, wondering evidently how he could ever have thought her anything but a remarkably handsome woman. But then all women look well in their wedding dress.

But the most attractive of the group, to judge from the glances of the congregation, is Mr. William Eagles. The white gloves, white waistcoat, and white bridal-favour, serve to render still more striking his pale face, black beard, and piercing eyes.

He, too, is absorbed by the bridesmaids: absorbed and troubled, so that he seems quite to forget his sister, and scarcely sees his trembling, white-haired father give her away from them to another.

One cannot be surprised at his starting with a

sudden terror when he looks first at Kern, because she is said to be very like the Mary Bull whom he loved in his youth, loved and forsook. And Mary Bull is dead! Lying without in that churchyard through which he passed!

But why does he look so restlessly at Aline? The girl is not thinking of him, has scarcely seen him, and he sees her for the first time. It cannot be her beauty, for she is not so lovely as Kern, yet his eyes are riveted on her face.

But now the ceremony attracts even William Eagles. He, too, listens when his sister makes her marriage vow, audibly, and utters those solemn words, so often pronounced, so rarely acted up to!

His father is very pale, and trembles visibly, as Mr. Raven makes those two human, separate, individual beings one by the mystic, invisible union, that God ordained, and his Son blessed and sanctified by his presence.

All is at last over, and we are again in the church porch.

A bright, mid-day sun has burst from amid the November clouds, and looks smilingly down upon the ivied church, and the gay people that issue from it. Crisp red and yellow leaves strew

the paths, shed by the tall elms that flank the church; and Miss Eagles' class of Sunday scholars have added their little nosegays of winter flowers to the autumnal windfalls.

Mr. Oliver Bat leads his bride over these scattered leaves, which are not quite inappropriate emblems of the autumn of his own life. A new chariot, and a handsome pair of bays await them, into which they step for the first time as man and wife.

The family coach receives the bridesmaids, Mr. Eagles and Mr. Bat, junior; and so they return to the Nest, well watched by the spectators.

The breakfast was prepared in the little dining-parlour by Mrs. Fluke and Kezia. The former who had conceived a great respect for the bride, which was warmly returned, volunteered her services to the amazement of everybody. Madam Rambully spared her readily, for she, too, esteemed Miss Eagles. At first she had barely tolerated her, but in the course of years she valued her sufficiently to disregard the gossip that reached even her. And how could a woman better show her regard?

And so Fluke waited, aided by the Messrs. Bats' servants, and little Jenny, dressed in

the smartest of new frocks, collar and handkerchief.

Kezia, of course, made one of the guests.

It was hard work to squeeze eleven people round those small dining-tables; but the very difficulty accelerated the plans of the guests. Sir John Nux managed to get next to Kern, and Mr. William Eagles by Aline. Lachlan sat opposite, next to Kezia, he having been too bashful to try the other and more attractive side. Kezia had Mr. Nicholas Bat on one side of her, and Kern, Mr. Bat; so the sisters were equally honoured by the proximity of those country squires of ancient family.

Mrs. Oliver Bat took the head of the table, as the only married lady, albeit of recent date,—and, at her father's urgent request, Mr. Oliver the bottom. As he was not a shy man, he bore his honours bravely.

How Mr. Bat proposed the health of the bride, and Mr. Oliver returned thanks; how he proposed the bridesmaids, and Lachlan had to make his maiden speech, blushing to the temples; how the bridesmaids cut the cake, or rather Kern cut it, and Aline laughed and looked on; and how Mr. Eagles broke down and fairly cried when they

drank his health coupled with his son's, may be imagined by every one who has been at a wedding.

As there was no great formality, so there was much of natural feeling in the little party.

It was worth something to see Fluke watch Aline and Mr. William Eagles. It mattered not what she was doing, she heard and saw all they said and did.

"You never were at a wedding before?" she heard, amongst the pauses in the general conversation.

"Never," said Aline. "And I've so longed to see one, and am so glad it is Miss Eagles."

"You like my sister?"

"I love her very much."

"You would love everyone, I think. You might even find a corner in your heart for such a miserable, shattered wretch as I am!"

"If I love everyone, of course I should," laughed Aline.

"Are you going to Italy with my mother?" said Sir John to Kern.

"I think I shall get my father to consent. Are you going, Sir John?"

"I shall either go with you or follow you. The bee must hum after the lily."

"Your lilies are numerous," said Kern. "You are truly a 'busy bee,' you 'gather honey all the day from every opening flower.' What a pity Dr. Watts didn't know you, Sir John."

"That little friend of yours is a pretty 'opening flower.' What a pair of eyes she has! Who can she be?"

"Aline, oh! you admire her. Do you call her a lily, and mean to buzz round her?"

"Rather more of the violet, or sweet brier, or wilding bind-weed, in your little friend, Miss Kern."

"Those are flowers bees get no honey out of. You will get none from Aline."

"A pretty name. A new name, but not so original as Kern."

"More romantic, Sir John. More musical."

"Less resolved, less secret. Aline! the name is of the daylight, open and bright. I wish I could read your mind, Miss Kern, after our long intimacy, as easily as I can read that little girl's at a glance."

"I should be sorry to be so instantly read. A book you glance through and see at once, is very

commonplace, always. I beg your pardon, Mr. Bat, you were speaking to me."

"Only asking if you had put the bridecake through the wedding-ring. I am sorry to have interrupted so pleasant a conversation."

"Oh! it was nothing remarkable. Lilies and sweet-brier formed the staple of it."

Sir John Nux bit his lip, and looked annoyed.

"Miss Rambully, you must positively dream over our bridecake," said Mr. Oliver, "and tell me what you dreamed of when we come home."

"I scarcely ever dream," said Aline. "At least I seldom remember what I dream about."

"And when you do remember, what are your dreams?"

"They are too silly to repeat, but they are what the poor people call lucky dreams. I so often dream of birds and flowers. But do put some cake through your ring, Miss Eagles—Mrs. Bat I mean—and we will all put it under our pillows."

The bridecake was duly put through the ring and distributed. Lachlan asked what it was for.

"Put it under your pillow to-night, and you

will dream of the fair damsel you love the best, and are to marry," said Mr. Oliver.

"Here is some for you, Mr. Bat," said Aline.

"I will dream of you if you will promise to dream of me," said Mr. Bat.

"I should like it of all things," said Aline; "I dreamed of you once."

There was a general laugh, and Oliver said he expected his brother would soon follow his example.

"To-morrow, if you will find me another Mrs. Oliver," said Mr. Bat, looking at Ellen, who was looking sadly at her father.

He was the only one of the party who could not feel or pretend to feel gay.

"Excuse me, you live at the Downs Farm, I think?" said Mr. William Eagles, addressing Aline.

"Yes."

"Then I am never to see you again after to-day."

"Oh! I hope we may meet again. I have promised your sister to come and see Mr. Eagles, if mamma will let me."

"Your mother lives at the Downs?"

"Yes."

"I seem to have a recollection of your

features and to have seen you before. Do you think your mamma would let you sit to me for your picture?"

"I do not think she would wish to have my picture."

"Could I paint you, I should have an object in this horrible place."

"Oh, sir, you have your father."

At that moment something attracted Aline's attention, and turning from Mr. Eagles she suddenly caught Lachlan's eyes fixed on her. He had been listening to their conversation with interest. She smiled so brightly at him, that Mr. Eagles also looked at Lachlan, almost for the first time, and addressed him.

"Did we not travel together last night?" he said.

Lachlan said, "Yes."

"Then I have to thank you for not boring me with questions when I wanted to be silent. Certainly the English have one advantage over their continental neighbours—that of silence."

"Still," said Lachlan, "I suppose the gift of speech was not intended to be undervalued. It is one advantage, at least, that we have over the brute creation."

"I believe they understand one another," said William Eagles, "just as well as we do."

"You would like to have been born deaf and dumb," asked Aline.

"Not in your presence," said Mr. William, lowering his voice. "Who is the young man opposite?"

"Lachlan Lyons, from Australia. He is so clever. A geologist and a lecturer already, and——"

"Thank you—that is enough. I hate clever young men, and abominate geologists, and I meet lions everywhere. I am one myself abroad."

Lachlan was watching William Eagles with his penetrating eyes, and reading him through. He said to himself, "I don't like that man. I wish he would let Aline alone. He is not good enough to speak to her. But her mind is like a mirror. If evil pass across it, it will leave no trace behind."

At last the breakfast was finished, and the bride and her bridesmaids went upstairs.

"You will be kind to my father, Aline. He is very fond of you," said Ellen, while Kern was arranging her bonnet in the looking glass.

"Yes, if I have an opportunity. And you will write to me often," said Aline.

When the travelling dress was on, and the ladies again downstairs, Sir John Nux and Mr. William Eagles both came to speak to Aline.

"You ride on the Downs still?" said Sir John.

"Yes—every morning when it is fine, and mamma is well; that is to say, I ride somewhere or other."

"She rides wherever there is sickness to be cured, or misery to be alleviated," said Mr. Eagles, senior, joining the trio for a moment, whilst his Ellen was talking to her brothers-in-law.

"Oh! Mr Eagles!" said Aline, colouring.

"You forgot to give me the tickets for the coal," said Mr. Eagles.

"It was only to ask you not to forget the people on this list," said Aline, drawing a sheet of paper from her pocket, and whispering her words as she slipped it into his hands, blushing as if she had committed a sin.

Mr. Oliver Bat, at Ellen's request, was going to give coal, instead of beer, to the poor of Yeo, and its environs, and her father was to distribute it that afternoon. The Messieurs Bat were to

feast their tenants and labourers at home—or rather they were feasting at that auspicious moment.

The sound of wheels was heard in the lane. Ellen looked at her father and left the room. He followed her into another. There took place the first parting embrace that had ever occurred between father and daughter. Thirty years had they lived together, and never before known the pang of separation.

"God bless you, Ellen!" was all he could say.

"Keep up—be cheerful for my sake, my dear, dear father," said Ellen.

Her veil was down when she re-appeared.

The whole party went to the little wicket gate, followed by the servants. Kisses, hand-shakings, blessings—and the newly-married couple were in the travelling carriage that was to take them away —and the bridesmaids and Fluke in the family coach behind them.

The latter were going to their respective homes.

The horses and servants looked gay with bridal favours, and as they drove off, those who remained gave them three hearty cheers.

"Here be the zhoe, zur," said little Jenny, coming timidly forward.

"Throw it yourself, child," said Mr. Eagles.

And Jenny ran with all her might, and hurled an old shoe, for luck, after the vanishing carriages.

"Well! if Miss beant grand!" ejaculated Jenny, as she stood till they were out of sight, "grander than Madam Love, or any o' the vine volks now. I be a'moast zure it all come of them letters."

As Jenny returned, so many shillings were put into her hands by the gentlemen, that her eyes half jumped out of her head with surprise, and she nearly lost her balance by repeated curtseys.

"I'll buy a handkercher as fine Mrs. Fluke's now, I'ull," she said to herself. "If she beant a cross'unm, I never zee one in my life."

Soon after the departure of the ladies, Mr. Eagles and Lachlan went to superintend the distribution of the coal, and the Mr. Bats returned home to see after their festivities. William Eagles went into the little drawing-room, and made himself as comfortable as he could in an easy chair by the fire. He glanced round the room at the paintings he had done in his youth, and soliloquized, mentally, something in this wise:

"What use has it all been to me? Ambition,

pride, fame; bubbles! bubbles! I wish I had never left this place. Why could not I have married Mary Bull, kept school, had children, visited the farmers, and been content. That splendid Kern reminded me of Mary, only she is prouder and better educated. I might have been at peace, at least, and in tolerable health; now I roam the world, and get neither peace nor health. What if I have painted fine pictures? other people have them and the money is gone. I am as poor as when I left this cottage twenty years ago.

"And then—bah! I cannot think of the intermediate time, much less speak of it. Who is that child-woman? Rambully! such a name for such an innocent creature, who should be a Euphrosyne or a Hebe. Oh! these fogs—this cough! It is impossible for me to stay here long. Ellen should not have asked me. She is lucky, at any rate, at least I suppose so, if there is ever luck in marriage. Men are fools to marry—fools! fools!—worse than fools! madmen. And I painted that imaginary picture of a pair of lovers! I, who no more believe in love than I do in Heaven. If there is one, there is both I suppose, since, 'Love is heaven, and heaven is love.'

"What trash it is! What liars and deceivers are poets and painters! Rhyming, and idealizing upon what they utterly disbelieve in. Even the honest loving eyes of that child are as sure to be unfaithful reflectors of the mind within, as I am to be haunted with their expression as long as I am in this place.

"That meddling Oliver too, insisting on my facing all these Bulls and Lyons—and he ignorant of my history all these years! I wish I could feel glad to see my aged father, and that care-worn Ellen—but they are a reproach to me. I am angry with them and myself, angry with the world—tired of life—searching for what I dread to find, and what, if found, would be my curse.

"What is the good of sitting here alone? I must go to my father and that keen-eyed young man. I wonder what he read in me? not my history I suppose, but I hate those penetrating people—No, I will go and look at Mary Bull's grave."

And as the afternoon shadows lengthened, and the sun sank red and purple behind the distant hills, and the many coloured leaves of the trees glowed with a deep evening orange grey, and the

damps began to fall, and the mists to rise from the valley and river—William Eagles stood in the church-yard by a tombstone, on which was inscribed,—"Sacred to the memory of Mary Bull. —Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord."

CHAPTER VIII.

LACHLAN IS FÊTED BY HIS FRIENDS.

During the whole of Lachlan's stay at Yeo, there was a succession of gaiety. He was the hero of a week, and fêted heartily. The Downs and Brooklands rivalled one another in large fires, and well-spread, amply covered tables, and the families of Lyons, Bull, and Low, made merry together.

Even Madam Rambully exerted herself into hospitality, and invited Kezia, Kern, Lachlan, and Luke, to spend an evening with her and Aline. So many years of frequent intercourse had brought the young people together, and Aline was now the friend of all the Lyons children, and the particular adorata of Luke. He had been impelled by his devotion to her, to take great pains with his learning, coat-tails, and shirt-

collars, and had grown into a very promising youth, much better appointed, outwardly at least, than his cousin Lachlan.

It had taken Fluke a long time to reconcile herself to Aline's love of "low company," as she called it; but she was at last fain to confess that Kezia was a very respectable, well-conducted young woman, and Kern was a lady by nature, only a vast deal too proud and conceited.

Madam Rambully was best pleased when Aline was happy, and so the girl made friends and companions of everybody who surrounded her.

Madam Rambully had on her handsomest suit of blue silks and white laces on that particular occasion, and was looked upon with great admiration by the young people. She was a very elegant looking woman, and always sat in a position that set off her figure to advantage. Aline took pleasure in adorning her easy chair with all sorts of lace-like coverings, and she seemed more cheerful, and in better health than in former days.

Kern sat on a low stool at her feet—a place she always took when she could, and Aline poured out the tea. Luke was exceedingly polite in the matter of handing the cups and eatables, and Kezia in helping Aline. Lachlan, alone, ap-

peared dreamy, and ill at ease. It was the last night but one of his leave of absence.

"And what did those people at Yeo say, after Miss Eagles was really married, Kern?" said Madam Rambully.

"Miss Daw said, that, for a man of family, fortune, and talent, to marry a poor schoolmistress, and strolling author—I suppose she had strolling player in her head—was unpardonable. 'Unpardonable,' said Miss Ann, and Miss Harriet sighed. I am sure she thought he might have proposed for her. Mrs. Love poured forth more words than usual in five minutes, and wound up by declaring, that 'she wouldn't call on any account if it were not for the children; but then Margaret Anne and Robert were such favourites of the Bats, and the next of kin, and in short, the Captain, who had a worse fit of the gout than usual, insisted, and she supposed they must visit. Mr. Perch pulled his whiskers, and said, 'Hem! haw! a fine match! a very fine match!' and my mother lamented that Kezia wasn't as lucky as Miss Eagles."

"Kern, how can you be so absurd!" said Kezia.

"Why, you know, Kezia, that Mr. Bat paid

you a great deal of attention at the wedding," said Aline. "Have you seen your relations yet, Lachlan?"

"I suppose we should come to Mr. Lachlan, now, Aline," said Madam Rambully.

"Oh, mamma! it sounds so stiff, but I will try."

Lachlan coloured.

"They all stared at me on Sunday, as if I were an ourang outang," he said, "and I really could not resist taking off my hat to the Miss Daws—but only Miss Harriet noticed me."

"I suppose the old ladies were too blind to see you," said Aline.

"They saw Sir John Nux, who was farther off. But Captain Love growled out a 'How d'ye do,' and asked me if I had been getting on with my lectures."

"The fact is, Madam Rambully," said Kern, "my cousin will not pay proper attention to his toilette. Margaret Anne said to me to-day that he was really improved in appearance, but he was still quite a Goth."

"I am sure he is not half as much of a Goth as that Lieutenant Love," said Aline. "I could

not bear to see him dressed out in those waistcoats and chains he wears."

Lachlan looked his thanks so speakingly at Aline, that Kern, who saw the glance as a matter of course, changed the conversation.

"Oh! Madam Rambully! You should know Mr. William Eagles! He is really a well-dressed man, and looks a gentleman without any effort to appear one."

"He frightened Aline," said Madam Rambully, "and Fluke took a wonderful dislike to him."

"Oh! then he must be a *mauvais sujet*," said Kern, satirically.

"I think he was enough to frighten any one," said Kezia, "with his wild eyes and long hair."

"I was not really frightened, mamma," said Aline, "but I felt a great pity for him. He looked unhappy."

"And discontented," said Lachlan. "Still he has, I hear, a high reputation as a painter."

"Pray do not name him again," said Madam Rambully. "I have no opinion of artists. You did not say he was an artist, Aline."

A visible shudder ran through Madam Rambully, and she put her hand over her eyes.

Aline was at her side in a moment, and moved

the large green shade that was between her and the candles, as if she fancied the light hurt her eyes.

"Thank you, dear child—it is all right now. You get on with Mr. Markman, Mr. Lachlan?"

"He is very kind to me, madam. He has offered to send me to the East, on the new railroad he is making there, and I hope to go shortly."

"Oh! Not so far! What will poor Stern do without you?" said Aline.

"He will come with me," said Lachlan. "I could not lose such an opportunity of seeing the world, and advancing in my profession."

"And perhaps Mr. Markman may take me as clerk, in Lachlan's place," said Luke. "Allow me, Miss Rambully!"

Luke rose hastily to take a cup and saucer from Aline, and the effect of his swallow-tailed coat was irresistible on Kern. She smiled at Lachlan, who said—

"You ought to be satisfied with Luke, at any rate; he will not disgrace your London friends."

"Yes. Dodson has excelled himself in that coat," said Kern. "Why, Luke, is it possible that Yeo produced it?"

"Yes," said Luke, proudly; "and this waistcoat came from Yeominster. I hope you like it, Miss Rambully."

"It is lovely," said Aline. "Roses, mamma, with small green leaves on a satin ground."

Madam Rambully smiled.

"I hope you have not given up the baronetcy," she said, turning to Lachlan. It was painful to see her ever address the person to whom she was speaking, with her blind eyes.

"I shall never give that up. It is my right, and I hope yet to win it back some day. It is very kind of you not to make a joke of it, madam," said Lachlan.

Aline's eyes glistened with delight.

"I am so glad you are just as ambitious as ever. That is what I should be if I were a man."

"And I as a woman," said Kern.

"It is better not to be high-minded," said the straightforward Kezia. "No good ever came of pride and vanity."

Madam Rambully asked for some music, and Kern was soon at the piano, with Aline and Luke on either side of her.

All the young people sang, except Lachlan,

who listened, and Madam Rambully occasionally made a beautiful second to the various songs. She was evidently a good singer, and musician. Kern was the *prima donna*, Aline the "bird of the greenwood," and Luke the village wonder. The latter sang "The Soldier's Tear" with dramatic illustration, which Kern satirized unmercifully in the face of her wholly unconscious brother.

At the end of each verse where—

"And wiped away a tear"

occurs, Luke put his new silk handkerchief to his eyes in so touching a manner, that Aline actually shed a tear for company, and Lachlan thought of the coming parting, and how he should act the lines,—

"Upon the hill he turned,
To take a last fond look,
Of the valley and the village church,
And the cottage by the brook."

But Kern said, "Bravo, Luke! You should turn your talents to account. You would make a fortune on the stage."

"Really, Kern?" said Luke. "If it were not for the engineering I might be tempted to try."

"Oh, no! Luke; don't," said Aline; "Mr. Raven says the stage is a great temptation, and I heard a preacher at the chapel say some dreadful things about it."

"Then I certainly will not, Miss Aline," said Luke.

Kern burst out laughing, and Luke was offended.

"How can you go to that chapel, Aline?" said Kern. "Why tailors and shoemakers are the ordinary preachers."

"I only sit outside under the trees, and they preach so loud that I can hear all they say. Mamma goes sometimes, and I assure you we often hear very good advice."

"And very grave denunciations," said Lachlan.

"Oh, Lachlan! you, who have preached yourself ought not to say anything against them," said Aline. "The workpeople all say they can understand them better than Mr. Raven."

"No wonder," said Kern, "for the preachers keep them awake, and Mr. Raven sends them to sleep."

"Mamma," said Aline, "will you play for us?"

Aline always tried to turn off Kern's religious satire. She had always a strong inclination to laugh and join in it, but at the same time an intuitive notion that it was wrong; moreover, her mother would sometimes listen to the itinerant preachers, and would never go to church; and Aline thought this was better than nothing.

"Only this once," said Kern, kneeling down by Madam Rambully, and looking up into her face.

Madame felt, if she could not see, the entreating glance. She went to the piano, and played so beautifully, that all the young people were entranced.

Aline kissed her mother's forehead, and put her hand on her shoulder; Kern looked at Lachlan, who was looking at the blind lady and her child.

"Beautiful exceedingly," he murmured, as he glanced at Kern, and caught her eye.

Kern frowned and blushed.

"Who was beautiful exceedingly?" she asked herself; and the natural response was, "It must be I. It is not Aline. She is not beautiful."

No one in that small room was conscious of other listeners than themselves to Madame's won-

derful music; but she played so seldom, that whenever she did touch the piano the household without were on the alert at once. Mr. Bull's pipe and Mrs. Bull's needle dropped unconsciously, and Fluke drew herself up in pride at her lady's superior talent. Joan stopped in her scrubbing, and said, "Lawk a daisy, that be playing and singing," and "Glowbason" opened his eyes wider than usual, if he chanced to be near, and said, "It was a moast as good as Noah Bleat, the clerk."

On this particular evening there were two new auditors. Sir John Nux and the Lieutenant found it necessary to visit the farm, and reached the back or garden door whilst Madam Rambully was singing. What could they do, but stop and listen? And the next step was to peep through an opening in the curtains at the party within.

"Who on earth can those ladies be?" said Sir John.

"No great things," said the Lieutenant. "They have no friends, and are humbugs, nobodies. See what a splendid girl that Kern is. The finest girl in England."

"What a divine voice!" said Sir John.

"Can't we get in?" said Love. "They'd be

proud enough to have us. Let's send in a pheasant."

"Stop, hush! She must have been professional! What a cultivated style. I wonder whether the daughter sings."

"There; they've done now. Let's go in."

Sir John knocked at the door. Joan appeared, saying—

"Who be'e this time o' night? We hant got nothin' to gee 'ee."

"Is your master at home?" said Sir John.

"Lawk, zur, I beg pardon," said Joan. "Iz zur, he be t'hoame. This way, zur."

The gentlemen followed Joan into the hall.

"How do you do, Mr. Bull?" said Sir John. "We have had good sport to-day, and I have brought you a pheasant."

"I thought you wanted to see Miss Kern Lyons," said Mr. Love, impatiently.

But Sir John turned to Fluke, who was sewing on the settle, and continued:

"I have also ventured to bring one for Madam Rambully, if she will do me the favour of accepting it."

"Thank you, sir," said Fluke, rising. "I will tell my lady."

"Get the old woman to ask us in," whispered the Lieutenant, as Fluke passed him. "I'll give you five shillings if you will."

"My lady don't see strangers, sir," said Fluke, aloud, "and I get very good wages, I'm much obleeged."

"Hang the old hag," muttered Love.

Fluke returned with her lady's compliments and thanks to Sir John, and the young men looked disappointed.

"Do you think you could tell Miss Kern Lyons that I have a message for her from my mother?" said Sir John to Fluke.

"Certainly, sir."

"Half a guinea if you'll get us asked in," again whispered Mr. Bob, desperately.

Fluke did not condescend to reply, and farmer Bull did so for her.

"You'll make nothing of her, master Robert. Can I do anything for you?"

"'Tis so confounded dull down here, that we want a bit of spree," said the young man. "I've a great mind to introduce myself."

"I wouldn't advise 'ee; Mrs. Fluke 'll be too many for 'ee."

Fluke re-appeared, as Bob was entering the

passage, with Sir John tugging at his coat-tails.

"Tell your mistress that Lieutenant Love has done himself the honour to call upon her," said he.

"He had better wait till he is called for," said Fluke, stalking by him.

"Haw, haw, master Bob, I told 'ee so!" said the farmer.

But Bob was not quite without comfort, as in the course of time, and when she had given her dignity its due, Kern came into the hall.

"My mother commissions me to tell you that she will leave London in about a fortnight, and she hopes you will be ready to join her in ten days, at most," said Sir John.

"If my father consents, I shall be quite ready." said Kern. "But I thought you were going, Sir John?"

"I shall follow—I cannot quite wind up my affairs here so soon."

"How long shall you be away, Miss Kern?" said Bob.

"Probably a twelvemonth."

"What new-fangled nonsense do you mean to bring back?" asked Mr. Bull. "Sir John, I

wish her ladyship knew that she's spoiling Kern for all useful purposes."

"It would be impossible to spoil Miss Lyons," said Sir John.

"But quite possible for her to spoil the butter and cheese, and to forget how to milk," said the farmer.

Kern frowned.

"She'll never want to do that, Mr. Bull. Why, she might have married anybody she liked in London," said Bob.

"Oh, Mr. Love! pray don't think it necessary to say such things," said Kern. "Probably I shall not see you again for some time, Sir John. I may as well wish you good-bye."

"I hope to see you a dozen times before you leave England. I shall be in London to see you off. By the way! my mother says Lord Inncaster has been asking her where you live."

"I hope she did not tell him," said Kern, off her guard for a moment.

"No! I believe she said she expected you in town, *en route* for Paris. He is going abroad."

"The old fool!" said Bob. "Does he think

she'll have him. He's sixty-five if he's a day, and wears a wig, and has a whole mouth full of false teeth."

Mr. and Mrs. Bull looked at one another and shook their heads : Fluke listened attentively.

"I shall go to my uncle's if I go to London," said Kern. "My father says that if I go at all it must be with my cousin, the day after to-morrow."

"I think of going up then," said Bob. "It's deuced slow down here. I shall go to Italy, I think, when I get leave."

"No good comes of them furrin parts, Mr. Bob," said farmer Bull. "People go there good, honest, straight-for'ard Englishmen, and come home mongrels; wi' heads like Scotch terriers, and bodies like monkeys, and manners like balambs."

" I'm much obliged to you, Mr. Bull,' said Sir John, bowing gravely.

" You're heartily welcome, Sir John. I meant no offence to you, at the same time; but as we've got as fine a country as there is on the earth, and a good language to speak our minds in, and plenty of friendly hearts to beat for one, when one's sick or sorry, and the pure light of

the Gospel to cheer one, when even friends are too weak; I don't see why we should leave old England."

"What other advantages do you find?" asked Sir John, looking interested.

"Well, Sir John, I never was in furrin parts, and I hope I never shall be, but I should say they were too numerous to mention. Still, I can find a few. There's good roast beef and plum pudding, instead o' kickshaws and fandangos, and frogs. There's fine home-brewed cider and ale, instead o' sour wine, and sugar and water: there's the jolly old country dance, with hands across, down the middle, up again and pousette, instead of your quadrilles and waltzes, and things that make one sick to look at: and there's prettier women and handsomer men to dance it, I'll be bound, than them mamzelles and mounseers."

"Anything more, farmer?" said Sir John, as Mr. Bull paused.

"Plenty, Sir John. There's fine frosty weather to brace one up, and give one a colour like a peony, instead of heat to make one as brown as a nigger; there's big fires on the hearth as 'ud roast an ox, instead of stoves as 'll scarce cook a cock-robin—there's feather beds

and blankets, and white sheets, instead o' mattresses and dirty linen; and there's plenty o' water and tubs to wash oneself in, instead o' basins not zo big as one o' my hands."

"Where did you get all your knowledge, Mr. Bull?"

"Part from books, part from travellers. But I consave, the greatest advantage of all is, that we've got the Protestant religion, and a free government, instead of papistry, and mummery, and slavery. Odds bobs! Sir John, what *do* one want more?"

"I really don't know, Mr. Bull, and I am half inclined to think you are right."

"And yet you'll be off again next month, I'll warrant. And my lady, your mother, and miss, your sister, and my grand-daughter Kern, there; and Mr. Bob Love, and Lachlan Lyons, and Mr. and Mrs. Oliver Bat,—one, two, three, four, five, six, seven,—good English men and women, are going or gone to follow your example; and here's Madam and Miss Rambully, as have come from France, or some such place. I can't see that any of 'ee are better or happier than I am, who never was more than twenty mile from home in my life."

"When my house is finished, I am coming home for good," said Sir John.

"Amen to that!" said the farmer.

With a few more concluding "last words," Kern returned to the parlour, and the young men took their leave.

"Of all the impertinent young nobodies, I ever saw," said Fluke, when they were gone; "that Lieutenant Love is the greatest. Now Sir John is a gentleman. Did he think I was going to take his compliments to my mistress? Why he 'aint fit to associate with her. I suppose he thinks all women are to be caught with money. He hasn't made my acquaintance yet."

"Bravo, Mrs. Fluke," said farmer Bull, "I don't wonder the Squoire admires you so much; do you, grandmother?"

"But 'tisn't mutual," said Mrs. Bull.

"On the *contrary*, ma'am, I think Mr. Low is as sensible a man as I ever see. Quiet, slow of speech, and handsome enough, for a man. But I don't want to have anything to do with any man under the sun. I can see through them all, and I never see anything in 'em yet but ollowness—present company excepted, of course, Mr. Bull. But I must pay you the compliment

of saying you was quite eloquent, and justified too, in your speech about the French and English."

"Yes, certainly grandfather had the best of it," said Mrs. Bull, approvingly.

CHAPTER IX.

THE EVE OF ALINE'S TWENTIETH BIRTHDAY.

Before Christmas came, Aline was robbed of most of her companions of the previous chapter. Lachlan Lyons took Kern to London on the appointed day, whence she shortly after went abroad with Lady Nux. Sir John followed them in a few weeks, and Lieutenant Love did the same, as soon as he could obtain further leave.

Lachlan took another step up the ladder by being sent by Mr. Markman to the East as engineer on a railway he had contracted to make. Luke took his place with much pride, in Mr. Markman's office, leaving his mother in the greatest grief at the flight of another of her "angels."

If my readers expect me to follow them in their foreign wanderings, they will be disap-

pointed. I have taken up my station at Yeo, and there I mean to remain, agreeing with Farmer Bull that the happiest are those who stay at home.

Suffice it to say here, that more than two years elapsed before any of the travellers, save the Lieutenant, returned to England. Various letters reached Yeo. Sir John wrote to his agent. Kern wrote, occasionally, to her father or Kezia, and Lachlan still more rarely wrote to his uncle or Mr. Eagles.

The letters of the two latter were read with great interest by all their friends, male and female, Madame and Aline included. They contained vivid descriptions of foreign manners and scenery, which, though new to their readers, would not be new to mine, so I will not transcribe them. Any one of the many books of travel in the west or east, that flow like streams of lava from the great volcano of the press, will describe the scenes they saw, and the society they entered, as well, or better than they did. It will be enough to say that Lachlan went steadily on in his profession, and rose gradually, as steady people will rise, and Kern was amused and admired as much as even she could desire.

Everybody seemed resolved to go away on that particular Christmas. Even Mr. Eagles was persuaded by his son to accompany him to London for his holidays, and so the Nest, as well as the Lodge and the Hall, was denuded of inmates, for little Jenny went home to her parents for the time.

Mr. Eagles was the first to return home and settle down to his work again, refreshed and cheered by change of scene. His son came and went in an erratic way, remaining a month or two at a time with his father, and then returning to London, where his fame as an artist was reaching its zenith. He and his sister were already talked of as "The gifted painter and novelist."

That sister wrote regularly to her father and Aline, such letters as ladies, newly and happily married, generally do write. The jaundiced eyes of Ellen Eagles had lost the hues that turned all she looked upon into dark yellow, and the eyes of Ellen Bat saw most things *couleur de rose*. Such is the power of love, the conqueror.

Aline felt sure that her charming letters would one day be published, and so positively refused to give them up to be copied into this history.

She always showed them, however, to Mr. Eagles and the Messieurs Bat, who scarcely knew which to love the most, the daughter and sister who wrote them, or the frank child-woman who read them so pleasantly and innocently.

Aline frequently visited the Nest. Of course people said that she went thither attracted by the handsome and melancholy William Eagles, but Aline heard no gossip, and was happily ignorant of what the little world around thought or said of her. Her mother saw no harm in her going to console the old man in the absence of his daughter, and as to the younger, the fact of his being an artist, tied Aline's tongue from speaking of him at all in the presence of her mother. Fluke scolded and argued, but Aline only laughed, and said "that Mr. Eagles, at least, was safe company, if Lachlan, Luke, and Sir John were not."

And so it happened, naturally, that whenever Mr. William Eagles was at the Nest, Aline saw him when she went thither. It happened, also, and quite as naturally, that he took an engrossing fancy to her. Her freshness and goodness won the heart of the hypochondriac. He felt better and happier when she was near, and so he

haunted her steps whenever they led her out of sight of the Downs Farm. He had enough of the feelings of propriety left, to avoid a spot which contained the parents of her whom he had deserted, and, accordingly, wandered about the Downs, or visited the poor that Aline visited, in order to get sight and voice of her.

Aline's mornings were still her own. Whilst her mother and Fluke were together over the toilette of the former, or engaged in conversations in which Aline was not to join, she rode from cottage to cottage in the vale, or on the Downs, making friends and finding her "Mission" wherever she went.

"Dear heart! no one will harm her!" Mrs. Bull would say; and the poor people called her "the zunbëam."

And like a sunbeam truly she went and came, glancing along brightly and merrily, bringing cheerfulness with her, and leaving it behind her wherever she went.

And yet Fluke was not wrong when she called her wilful and wild, and even accused her of being a "grown-up tomboy," for she would have her way, and would race and jump her pony like a schoolboy, when nobody saw her.

John Dull was heard to say that "zure, if 'twarnt vur her long gown, her shud be a reacin' vur a cup at Yeominist pwony reace, her wur zo vast on her zeat—her wur a leady now, her wur!"

And another of the farm-labourers, seeing her run along the meadows, complimented her by saying, "her have the eye of a hawk, and the heel of a hunter."

And with it all Aline grew up, fresh and happy and pure as the larks she loved to watch, the light of her mother's heart, the pride of Fluke's, in spite of her scoldings, the pet of the farmer and his wife, and the sweetest flower in the imaginations of the Eagles and Bats.

All the Ravens, too, loved her, but of them she now saw little, having lost her friend, Miss Eagles, and being shy of the Yeo people now she was gone.

Notwithstanding her numerous admirers, Aline reached her twentieth birthday without having had one regular lover, or a proposal of any kind.

This was, probably, the reason of her being so light-hearted and free from care. There is no denying that wherever Cupid makes an inroad, there he is sure to plant an arrow that actually

wounds. Whether "the course of true love" runs smooth or not, the vessel it bears on its surface is never without its difficulties. Sometimes it is becalmed, and then it is dull and heavy, sometimes it springs a leak, and the love oozes out, and sometimes the sails flutter and flap in the gusts of ill-temper or jealousy.

At any rate the dews of tender passion bring up weeds as well as flowers, and Aline, I repeat, was all the happier, because she knew it not. Still she was deeply interested in the heart secrets of her friends. She thought Kern hard-hearted, because she had so many lovers, and cared for none, and pitied the Lieutenant because he was so devoted, and Kern would not have him. She also feared that Lachlan was yielding to the power of Kern's surpassing beauty and talents, and sighed to think that he, too, might be made unhappy.

But mostly she pitied Mr. William Eagles. She had heard of his early love for the beautiful Mary Bull, and innocently believed that his unhappy, morose, discontented mind, was the consequence of his desertion of her. She had thought of the possibility of reconciling him to Mr. and Mrs. Bull, and wished she might

be the medium; but as yet, no opportunity occurred.

Aline's birthday was in the genial month of June, and it was on the eve of this twentieth anniversary of it, that she went to see Mr. Eagles, to wish him good bye, before he again left the Nest, to go to London with his son for his holidays, and thence, perhaps, to Paris, where Mr. and Mrs. Oliver Bat would be, previously to their return home from their long travels.

As Aline and Max walked across the Downs on that bright June morning, they held converse as intimate friends usually do.

"To-morrow, Max," said Aline, "I shall be old, quite old. And we shall have been more than ten years in this dear place. Yes, Max! you jump and frisk for joy, and I feel as if life were really to begin for me to-morrow. I am to know my mother's history—who I really am—what is expected of me—and what I ought to do to make her more happy than she is."

Here Aline paused, and looked at the glowing landscape below her. She inwardly asked for strength and direction to do right, and went on again:

"I suppose I shall not always be as happy as I

have been, Max ; but you shall have a happy life, at any rate, and so shall mamma, and Fluke, and every one else, if I can manage it. Well, cheer up, old dog, and listen to the larks ! Yes, jump up —high—higher—you won't reach them, and I won't forget that I have made up my mind to imitate them, not only in song, but in flight."

Here she burst out into a pretty wild cadence, and Max began to bark—and then they both took to running across the Downs, with the fresh morning air helping them along.

When Aline reached the Nest, and stood for a moment waiting for the door to be opened, she heard sounds of loud altercation proceeding from the dining-room. The voices were those of Mr. Eagles and his son, and she more than once distinguished her own name.

As she was considering whether she should go away again or not, Jenny came to the door, looking scared.

"Lor, miss, I be zo glad," she said, "come in here, do 'ee please, miss," and she drew Aline into the little drawing-room. "They be a quarrellen about you, miss. I heerd it all. Laws ! I be a moast flummocksed to death. Measter William be zo vierce, that I be avraid him 'll kill old

measter. I lowzend, till I thowt I'd run away."

The words "I swear I never said a word to Aline that an angel mightn't hear," reached the ears of Aline from the parlour, in Mr. William Eagles's voice.

"I say, sir, you shan't tamper with that child's feelings at all," from Mr. Eagles.

A loud oath, and a sound like a blow followed from the son.

"I will go in," said Aline, turning very pale.

"Lawk a massy, Miss, don't ee," said Jenny, holding Aline's dress. "You don't know what hem be when hem's in a passion. Hemud knock 'ee down zo zoon as luk."

"I'm not afraid! Let me go," said Aline, as the voices grew louder and louder.

She released herself from Jenny's grasp, and went quietly into the dining-parlour. The father and son were standing opposite each other. Their eyes flashed, and their faces were convulsed with passion, particularly that of the younger man, whose hand was upraised as if on the point of striking a blow.

"Coward! would you strike your own father?"

were the words Aline heard as she entered the room, trembling and pale.

"I am come to wish you both good-bye," she said, as composedly as she could.

She glanced from father to son. She had seen the old man excited before, but never the younger one—therefore she had never before seen such a face. But his eyes fell, and his hand dropped beneath her look of wonder and terror. He could not trust himself to speak, or even to glance at her again: he muttered something, and left the room.

Aline went to Mr. Eagles, and putting her hand in his, said timidly—

"I am very sorry, Mr. Eagles, to have overheard part of what you and Mr. William were saying. I did not mean to listen. But you need not fear for me. He is always very good to me, and tells me that I do him good. He says that I calm his troubled mind, when it is tossed about by demons. I don't quite understand him, very often, but I am glad to do any one good, and he does not frighten me as he does some people. I do not think he is mad, only unhappy."

"My child, you do not know him," said Mr. Eagles, sitting down, and putting his hand over

his eyes; "he is too subtle for you. He is my son, and I love him only too well, but I would spurn him from me as a serpent, if he harmed or deceived you."

"He cannot harm me, Mr. Eagles, and he says I do him good. I do not know how it is but he leaves me calmer than when he comes to me."

"But he pretends to love you, child, I know he does: and I fear for you. He has ever had a wondrous power over your sex."

Aline looked puzzled.

"I do not see why he should not love me, Mr. Eagles. I wish you all to love me, as I love you all. I do not know him so well as I know you and dear Mrs. Bat, but still I love him for your sakes."

"And not for his own?"

"Yes, I think I love him for his own. He is so lonely and wretched, he says; and he looks so very, very ill; and his large black eyes are so sadly melancholy—and he is not a religious man, I fear, dear Mr. Eagles—and I pity him from my very heart."

"But what can a child like you do for such a man as that?"

"I can be sorry for him, and pray for him, as I would for my father, if I had one."

Mr. Eagles looked into Aline's honest eyes, in which tears were now gleaming, and said, with evident effort—

"Tell me that you do not love him with the one deepest love of woman, and I shall be happy again."

Aline recoiled, and withdrew her hand from Mr. Eagles', as if offended.

"Mr. Eagles," she said, with dignity, "your son is older that my mother. I do not think he is a very good man—I know he has been the cause of misery to all my dear friends at the Downs Farm—I see that other untold sorrows, perhaps sins, weigh him down—if ever I love with the love you name, it will not be such as he."

"Forgive me, Aline, my sweet, innocent child. I have been again rash and hasty, when I thought my temper was curbed for ever. May God forgive me! And I have excited my son to wrath, contrary to the commands of Scripture, but it was from fear,—fear for you. He has haunted your steps, and even the places where your feet have been, so constantly that I could restrain myself no longer, and one word brought

on another. Oh! what those hasty words will do! They rise from a unit to a quadrillion heap in no time. And he has never hinted of love to you?"

"Never."

"What shall I do! Perhaps he will go off to Italy again. I must go and look for him. Good bye, my child—God bless you!"

Mr. Eagles rushed out of the house.

Jenny was in the room almost immediately.

"Massey me, Miss, Measter William be gone off in a precious passion, and now measter be gone arter 'un."

"And I suppose I must go too, Jenny," said Aline.

"I wish I were gwine, zure I do. Luk yu, Miss, they be allus quarrellin, and Measter William a moast knocked I down one day for nothing at all. He *be* a temper. And hem do go into tantrams for nothing, and do aggravate measter till hem be a moast out of hem's mind."

"Never mind, Jenny, you shouldn't listen at the door."

"Lor, Miss, a deaf man couldn't help listenen, and hearen too."

Aline and Max left the Nest much more quietly

than they came to it. When upon the Downs, Aline sat down on the sloping turf to think, and to try to understand what she had heard. Her thoughts took something of the following form.

"What made Mr. Eagles think I loved him? Has there been anything in my manner to make him fancy I do? Do I love him? Yes—no—I feel for him as I never felt for anyone before, and still it is not, it cannot be the sort of love that I saw in Ellen Eagles for Mr. Oliver. And yet it is quite a different love from what I feel for his father, for Daddy, for Luke, or even for Lachlan. I am troubled when he is near me, and I think of him when he is away. His great, wild, painful eyes haunt me in my dreams. I long to be of use to him, to comfort him, to wait upon him. He is always in my thoughts. And yet, surely, this is not what they call love. What Thekla felt for Max, or Juliet for Romeo? No; for I would not—could not marry him for worlds. And still I must have said or done something to make Mr. Eagles think I love him, for he never misjudges me. I have been oftener to the Nest when he has been there than when his father was alone. I have walked with him on the Downs, I have met him in the cottages, I

have never shunned him, I have rather sought him. Fluke is right. I *am* self-willed, and in spite of her advice, I have roamed about too much by myself. Oh! if other people say and think as Mr. Eagles does, I shall never be able to look any one in the face again."

A burning blush overspread Aline's cheeks as she thought of these things, and Max looked at her anxiously, wagging his tail the while.

"And I am a grown woman! To-morrow I shall be twenty. What a birthday-eve this is! It feels quite like the beginning of troubles. I suppose it is full time for me to put off the child and put on the woman. Ah me! Max, we mustn't run and jump any more, and Thekla must grow grave as well."

(She had called her pony Thekla.)

"Aline, speak to me but one word," said the voice of Mr. William Eagles from behind.

Aline started up.

"You do not, you cannot be influenced by the maunderings of that old dotard, my father," said William Eagles, facing the girl with a brow like a thunder-cloud, eyes like lightning, and a voice like the thunder itself. Worn-out similes all, but true ones. "Walk on with me, and listen."

Aline obeyed, trembling, and Max growled, He did not like William Eagles.

"I tell you, child, woman—whatever you are —that the old man has lied to us both. I will leave him, but before I go away you must hear me. I love you—I cannot say how I love you, or why, but you are the one mysterious link that still holds me to Yeo. For the rest, I hate it, and everybody in it, but my father—and how I could——"

"Hush, hush!" said Aline.

"If I could I would carry you off with me to Italy, but you would not come. That invisible mother of yours would keep you here. Why does she bury herself where I may never see her? tell me, Aline."

"I do not know; but I would never leave her; and pray, pray, do not talk so strangely to me."

Aline shrunk away from her companion as she spoke.

"You need not fear me, girl. I would not hurt a hair of your sweet head. Bad, passionate, hateful, hopeless, wretched I am; a Cain, a wanderer on God's earth, but I love you with a passionless love that I cannot understand or de-

scribe. Come nearer to me, child. If you show fear of me, I shall go mad."

Aline thought he was going mad, but she went again close to his side, and put her hand on his arm. The touch seemed to calm him.

"Promise me that you will not leave your father in anger," she said, fixing those loving, spaniel-eyes on his face, "and I, too, will love you, and pray for you, as long as I live."

"I promise anything for your love," he said; "but your prayers would not avail for me. I am past maudlin sentiment, and have no faith in man or deity. I thought I had no heart until I saw you, and now I feel it beat for the first time for years."

"How shocking!" said Aline, shuddering.

"I pain you, child. I terrify you. I will do so no more. I shall see you again, but now I must go. There is your home upon which I should hate to look, but that you live in it. You have promised to love me. Beware how you break your promise! I go!"

As he said these last words, he suddenly turned, threw his arms round Aline, kissed her

several times, and then, releasing her, strode off with the pace and air of a madman.

When Aline recovered from this wild embrace, she felt injured and offended, but before she had time to think of the man who had thus insulted her, Mr. Eagles stood at her side. He had witnessed the scene from a distance, and hurried towards Aline from one part of the Downs, while his son was rushing off in another.

"Oh, Mr. Eagles," said Aline, "you must be right. I will never go to your house again—never. I will never walk on these Downs alone again—never. But, oh! do not be angry with him. You will drive him quite mad, and I believe he is nearly so already. He spoke and looked so wildly, that he frightened me. Stay and watch me down the hill—no—go after him, if you please, Mr. Eagles. He may do something rash and wrong. I fear for him."

"And you, my child, what of you?"

"Nothing will harm me. I am quite well. Do not fear for me. He said he would not hurt a hair of my head, and I am sure he would not. Good bye! Make haste to follow him. Good bye!"

Aline ran down the hill as fast as she could,

and was soon in the house. Fluke met her. She said—

"What's the matter, Miss Aline? You're as white as a sheet. Something has happened to you."

"Never mind, Fluke. Don't frighten mamma. I feel rather faint."

Fluke fetched the necessary remedies, and Aline soon recovered. Fluke looked at her with her most searching glance.

"Somebody has annoyed you, Miss Aline. If that Eagles has done it, I'll summons him before Mr. Bat. You went to the Nest, and he came home with you. I can guess well enough. You'll know to-morrow why you're not to take up with the scum of the earth, and then you'll listen to them as 'ave seen more of the world than you 'ave."

"I shall be wiser, perhaps, when I am twenty," said Aline, making an effort at her usual cheerfulness; "and as that will be to-morrow, we must keep upon the old terms to-day. You mustn't scold me on this last day of my teens, Fluke."

Madam Rambully was heard calling Aline, and so the conversation ended.

CHAPTER X.

ALINE'S TWENTIETH BIRTHDAY.

The following morning Aline had reached her twentieth birthday, and her mother's long-promised history was to be told. Mother and daughter had slept but little that night, and awoke in a state of excitement and agitation. The former said that she would get through her painful task as early as possible, and accordingly, immediately after breakfast, Fluke made the necessary preparations.

Madam Rambully sat in the easy chair by the window of her bed-room. She had on the loose white dressing-gown in which she generally passed her mornings, and looked pale and sad. By her side was a table covered with all kinds of etherous medicines, and on her lap a nosegay that Aline had brought her.

Aline sat at her feet, on a low stool, struggling to be calm, and looking grave and anxious.

The room was cool and fresh, with its white furniture, as when the mother and child first entered it. The morning breezes moved the muslin curtains. A bullfinch piped on the window-sill, and the birds sang loudly in the garden-trees. The sheep bleated on the Downs, which, with the heavens above them, looked upon the pair, as the mother related to the daughter the history of her life. Fluke was working in Aline's room, which communicated with her mother's, to prevent eaves' droppers, and so none of the other members of the household knew that Aline was, in truth, about to begin life, in listening to her mother's story. Something told the young girl, that the blithe Aline of the last twelve years, was to vanish, and to leave the thoughtful woman in her place.

Madam Rambully spoke as follows. Her voice was very low, but tolerably firm. She seemed to seek for strength amid the dark locks of her child's hair, which she smoothed or ruffled nervously.

"My father, and your grandfather, Aline, was Sir Thomas Sedgland, of Sedglands Abbey. My

mother was Miss Auster, daughter of Mr. Auster, of Lee Park. My father was one of the oldest baronets of his county, and my mother's father one of the most ancient of the county gentry. The abbey and the park were about five miles apart, and the Sedglands and Austers were always good neighbours and friends, so my parents had known one another from childhood. I believe they never thought of marriage in their youth; few people do, I think, who are brought up much together. My father was in the army until his father's death; and was, I have heard, a very gay man. He was upwards of forty when he came to the title and property, and had, I suppose, sown his wild oats, as he settled down into a pattern country gentleman. My mother was a beauty, and, as beauties not unfrequently are, a coquette. So she flirted with one and another, until she was verging on old-maidism, and thought it time to marry somebody.

"On whom could she look to better purpose than on Sir Thomas Sedgland? And, as she and her sister were co-heiresses of their grandmother's large fortune, on whom could he look to better purpose than on her?

"My dear child, you are surprised. These are very respectable reasons for matrimony in the world without our little world. Besides, the youngest Miss Auster, my dear Aunt Nelly, was never likely to marry, she having been engaged to a gentleman, who died after the wedding-day was fixed."

"How very sad!" said Aline. "Is she living?"

"You shall hear, but you must not interrupt me. Well, my father, Sir Thomas Sedgland, married Miss Auster; and everybody thought it a very proper match. He was forty, and she nearly forty, but she was so young-looking and handsome, that no one could suppose her to be more than seven or eight and twenty.

"I was born about five years after this marriage. The disappointment was great that I was not a boy, but as a girl was better than no child at all, I was joyfully received.

"I was brought up in great seclusion. My parents knew the world and its various temptations well, and thought, as many parents do whose own youth has been passed in gaiety and society, that the best way to preserve me from its snares, was to keep me shut up in Sedglands

Abbey. Accordingly, I had governesses and mistresses in the house, to teach me everything that it was necessary for me to learn, and to be always with me. I was never allowed to be alone."

"Oh, mamma, how dreadful!" said Aline. "How much kinder you have been to me than your parents were to you. But then you could not get into trouble."

"Not as long as I was under their care. My father and mother, were, I believe, very fond of me—but they had such a horror of making me a spoilt child, that they erred on the other side. They were formal with me, and I was afraid of them. I longed for the time when I should be grown up, for then they must, I thought, perforce, take me into the world.

"Sedglands Abbey was a very beautiful place, but I grew more tired of its handsome rooms, fine furniture, stately company, and even of its lovely grounds and gardens before I was fifteen, than you would grow of this farm-house, Aline, if you lived here all your life."

"I should never grow tired of the Downs, mother, and I hope I shall never leave them."

"That no one knows, Aline! Perhaps I should

have loved my home better had I had more liberty: but I felt like a solitary robin in an aviary of grand old birds—and longed to get out. I inwardly vowed, that if ever I had an offer of marriage, I would accept it, were it good or bad, and free myself from the magnificent cage that held me. I little knew, then, how delightful those gilded wires would seem to me at a future period, in the retrospect.

"There was the usual amount of company at the Abbey. I think it must have been a formal place to visit at, but people came to stay in the house, or to dinner-parties, much as they do at other country houses. I made my appearance, with my governess, in the drawing-room, after dinner, and my disappearance before any of the gentlemen came in, so I am scarcely a fair judge, even of my own home. If I stumbled upon a chance guest in my walks, my governess instantly took me away from him or her, having strict orders to keep me unseen until I came out. Of course, this 'coming out' became the one end of my existence, and I practised music and singing more diligently than anything else, because I was told it would make me successful in society.

"My parents were not literary people, and my governesses had no decided taste for reading, so I never cared much for books. If I could get hold of a novel I devoured it, but I never read any other kind of book for my own pleasure; so I may say that my mind was uncultivated, though it was for ever being ploughed and sown with all sorts of grain.

"My grandfather and grandmother died before I was grown up, and the Lee Park went to their eldest son, my Uncle James, who is also since dead, and the property is in the hands of his son, a young man of whom I know next to nothing, as I was a baby when he was a big boy, and I have not seen him for more than twenty years.

"The only place to which I was permitted to go, was to my Aunt Nelly's. She lived in a small, but cheerful and pretty house, about two miles from the Abbey. I liked it better than the Abbey. It was called Ash Grove, from a lovely grove of mountain ash that grew on the property. I see their clusters of scarlet berries now, in imagination, as I saw them then."

Madam Rambully's voice trembled for the first time, and her hand moved nervously through

Aline's curls. Aline rose immediately, kissed her mother, and gave her a few drops of sal volatile.

"I must not stop to describe Aunt Nelly, or that dear Ash Grove, Aline, or I shall break down. Had she been my mother, and that house my home, my lot might have been different. I get wild when I think how different! and you might have been——"

"Not born, perhaps, mamma," said Aline, cheerfully, and patting her mother's hand.

Madam smiled, and continued:

"When I was eighteen I was allowed, for the first time in my life, to make my appearance at the dinner-table. There was a party in honour of the event. My parents took evident pride in my manners and dress, which were said, whether truly or not I cannot tell, to be unexceptionable. They did not know my mind, and I did not know theirs. How should we be acquainted with what lay below the surface of one another, when we had never made an effort to search for it? I believe they had an implicit faith in my prudence, because I was quiet and precise in my manners, and I felt that their position and fortune made me, as an only child, a person of consideration.

"There were no unmarried men at that first party, so I could not take a fancy to any one, if I would, and my father told me that he should be careful to introduce me only to such persons as would be respectable and eligible when he thought it right for me to marry; but he did not wish me to make any choice until I was one-and-twenty.

"Of course I began to know more of my mother when I was more with her, and should, doubtless, soon have lost my reserve, and won more of her confidence had not death separated us. But long before I was nineteen she died after a short illness.

"Ah, Aline! I never knew what love was till I lost her. When I saw her dying, and heard her last words, I knew that we had lost eighteen years of maternal and filial life, and I think she knew it too. She said more than once that she prayed to live that we might learn to love, and that she hoped I knew how dearly she really loved me. My heart opened for the first time on my mother's death-bed.

"You may now understand, Aline, why I have never thwarted you, and have made you my companion from your earliest years. I am sure you will never deceive me."

Aline kissed her mother, and was resolved to tell her of Mr. William Eagles as soon as her own story was ended.

"My father's grief was deep and sincere; but he did not display it to me. He and I were equally reserved by nature, and I think we each restrained our feelings to endeavour to support the other. Be that as it may, I had to wait for a second death-bed before I knew my father.

"He only survived my mother about two years, during which time he lived in strict retirement, and would see no company. He had me constantly with him, and Aunt Nelly stayed a great deal with us, so that these two years were happy enough. I look back on them with pleasure, although I longed at the time for some of the gaieties and enjoyments of life. My father did not know this, and frequently told my aunt that he had the highest opinion of my steadiness and superior understanding. I was a hypocrite more from fear than from any wish to be one.

"I thought then, as I think now, that parents should make friends of their children, and encourage them to openness and sincerity. It is a terrible discovery for a child to make on the death-bed of a father, that she has never shown a

child's tenderness, and scarcely felt it. And yet we never quarrelled. I never disobeyed him, and he was never unkind to me. Even now I cannot understand it.

"My father died suddenly, and I was his sole heiress. I could not describe to you my varied feelings of horror, sorrow, and affection; but mixed with them was a shocking joy that I could not repress, at being my own mistress, and having no longer any one to prevent my seeing the world and enjoying life."

"Dear mamma," said Aline, wiping the tears that were gathering in her eyes, "was there no clergyman all this time to teach you, as Mr. Raven does me, of the time when we shall meet again, and know entirely the friends we have lost?"

"Aline, you are always thinking of things beyond your knowledge. I never cared for clergymen, or knew much of any of them. Our rector came regularly to dinner, and was a very nice man, and very good to the poor; but we did not want him in his clerical capacity."

"But he ought to have gone to you, whether you wanted him or not," persisted Aline.

"Nonsense, child. He was a fat old man, and

I did not care much for him. I remember he did come to see me, and made use of the usual common-places, to which I listened as to something that did not concern me. He said that trouble was for our good, and I did not believe him any more than I believe now that it is good for me to be blind, and deserted, and—but I must go on with my story.

"I found myself an heiress just before I was twenty-one. My Aunt Nelly and my father's brother were my trustees. The latter inherited the baronetcy and the Abbey, which was entailed, and I came in for upwards of forty thousand pounds.

"At one-and-twenty, then, I was mistress of myself and of a large fortune. I had letters of condolence and invitations for change of scene from every family in the neighbourhood; but I was resolved to go to London as soon as propriety would admit of it, and begin life there, being tired to death of the country.

"Meanwhile I stayed with Aunt Nelly, leaving the Abbey with little regret. I prevailed on her to go to London with me, and we went to a fashionable lodging, and embarked in fashionable life.

"I had scarcely made my launch, when I received various proposals of marriage; but one thing I was decided upon, which was, that I must be desperately in love before I accepted any. This one idea I had nurtured ever since I could remember, together with the image of a young man with large black eyes, black hair, and considerable talent. How this fancy came to me I cannot tell, but I had it.

"It was not very long before my resolution was put to the proof. We were invited to a party given by a lady of rank, at which we were to meet some of the literary celebrities of the day, as well as some famous artists. Lady Maria Caxton was a blue, and a celebrity-hunter, and had always lions to show, as well as young cubs to introduce.

"On the present occasion she had a remarkable young lion in her menagerie, who had main and tail enough to attract everybody's attention."

"Mamma," interrupted Aline, as she felt her mother's hand tremble, "will you finish to-morrow?"

"No, no—at once. I will go through with it. I am calm enough. Lady Maria had somewhere met with a young artist, named Signor d' Aquile,

whom she mentioned to all her friends, as a man of extraordinary talent, and of Italian extraction. She said he was anxious to get to Italy, the country of his ancestors, in order to study painting, and that meanwhile he was doing what he could to live in England.

"This is all I rememember of her version of the story, for when she gave it, she was rapidly sketching the histories of all the celebrated people in her rooms, for the benefit of my aunt and myself, who knew none of them.

"Signor d'Aquile was standing apart, quite alone, when he was pointed out to us. When I looked at him, he was looking at me; and so our eyes met at once. I beheld my hero. I suppose it would have been impossible to find a handsomer, or more remarkable-looking young man. Assuredly he had the large black eyes, the long black hair, the pale complexion, and the marked profile of my dream-land ideal. I was fascinated at once, and watched him all the evening.

"Lady Maria Caxton introduced him to several of her guests, and his manner was perfectly easy and gentlemanlike. I suppose he was conscious of my watching him, for I frequently perceived

that he was looking at me, and striving to be near me.

"He sang well, and accompanied himself, and before the evening was over he was its attraction. It was impossible not to notice him, both as regarded his person and talents, and to notice was to admire. He could win, by a glance or a word, the attention of whomsoever he would.

"I played, and this gave him an opportunity of making some little remark to me, as he came to the piano, professedly to listen.

"You think I play well now, Aline, but I have lost much of the execution I had then. His one word, half whispered, reached me through the louder praises of others who surrounded me. I hear it now. It was 'Divine!' Oh! how it thrilled to my very heart.

"I detest myself for remembering every look and word of that man. I went home to dream of him; and I arose the next morning resolved to see him again, if possible. I had no difficulty. We met him in the park,—at the Royal Academy,—at the Opera,—everywhere, every day for weeks. He did not even bow, but he looked, and that was enough for my miserable, weak infatuation.

"My good Aunt Nelly would sometimes say, 'There is that young painter—how handsome he is,' or some such thing; but she only saw him occasionally, while I saw no one else.

"Suffice it to say, Aline, that never having before loved any one deeply, I lavished all the love I had in my nature on a man to whom I had scarcely spoken.

"My aunt wondered at my indifference to the admirers, or professed admirers, who surrounded me. I laughed, and said they only cared for me because I was an heiress, and I did not want to marry yet. She, dear soul, was content, always begging me never to accept any one whom I did not really love.

"We had a box at the Opera, and I was so fond of music, that we rarely missed going thither once or twice a week.

"One evening, as we were waiting in the lobby for our carriage to come up, I was for a moment disengaged. My aunt was talking to some one else, my *cavalieri* were not in attendance.

"Signor d'Aquile suddenly appeared, and coming up to me said, 'I beg your pardon, but I think I saw you drop this—allow me to return it.'

"He did not wait for me to speak, but putting a

nosegay of blush roses into my hand, bowed, and left me.

"My confusion and agitation were such, that I wonder my aunt did not perceive them. We got into the carriage at last, and when I reached my room, I examined the precious flowers. They contained a copy of verses, addressed to me, which were as complimentary as they were beautiful. I have never had the courage to destroy them, weak fool that I am, and some day I will show them to you, together with the withered roses. At the bottom of the verses were a few lines, saying, that if the writer had not offended me by his presumption, he hoped I would carry one of the roses in my hand the following day.

"Of course I did so, and met the donor more than once. He saw the flower, and looked at me. I returned the glance, and, naturally, this was encouragement enough.

"As I was my own mistress, I received my letters and answered them, without showing them to Aunt Nelly, unless they contained anything interesting to her. Consequently there was no difficulty in Signor d'Aquile's opening a correspondence with me. He did so. His letters were of the most respectful kind, but full of devotion

and romantic passion, as well as of marks of the highest genius, which I knew well how to appreciate. I had only to put the answers into a neighbouring post-office myself, and thus we wrote to one another for more than a fortnight, unsuspected. He did not venture to propose for me, but my heart told me it was his position alone that prevented his doing so.

"I was resolved to bring this about myself, and therefore told my aunt that, as I had heard Signor d'Aquile much praised as a portrait painter, I meant to sit to him for my portrait. She approved, wrote to him, at my request, and the first sitting was arranged.

"I suppose my natural reserve, and quiet manners, were safeguards against all suspicion. From childhood I had been considered trustworthy, and as nobody really knew me well, so nobody ever suspected me of an underhand action. Indeed I had never been guilty of one before, and considering myself mistress of my hand and fortune, I did not choose to think myself to blame, even in this.

"Before my portrait was finished, Signor d'Aquile and I were solemnly pledged to one another. I heard, afterwards, of other girls who were madly in love with him, but I was, he said,

the only woman he ever had loved, or ever could love. He had felt that our fates were inseparable from the first time he ever saw me.

"Of course I believed every word that he said: and who would not? Such eloquence, passion, tenderness! Such perfect acting, perhaps, never before won the entire devotion of a woman. God knows I was his entirely.

"When I told Aunt Nelly that I meant to marry him, she would not believe me; but I soon convinced her of the fact. A phalanx of uncles, aunts, and cousins rushed upon me, with every possible argument pointed against me; but I stood firm. Reproaches and remonstrances were alike unavailing. I said I would marry him, and I kept my word.

"My Uncle George and Aunt Nelly, as trustees, were the greatest obstacles to my marriage; but, as they had no real power over me, they withstood me in vain. I was perfectly calm, and all they said only made me the more resolved. It ended by their declaring that if I persisted in marrying this foreign adventurer, cheat, swindler, they would renounce me for ever, and by my informing them, in return, that they were at liberty to do so.

"However, Aunt Nelly so far relented as to persuade me—when she saw she could not turn me—to have my fortune settled on myself. She even went so far as to beg my Uncle George to see Signor d'Aquile, with her, on this subject. After much altercation he consented to do so.

"Such was the fascination of my then affianced husband that he wholly won over my aunt, by his conduct and manners, and partly my uncle. They agreed that he was a gentleman, and a man of education, and that he was evidently disinterested. He said that they and I might do what they liked with my money, provided I did him the unmerited honour of becoming his wife.

"I was more disinterested than he was, and an amiable feud arose between us, as to whether my whole fortune was to be settled on me or not. It ended by my allowing half of it to be settled on myself.

"In due time Signor d'Aquile became my husband, and is, if he be still alive, your father."

Here Madam Rambully paused. The recollection of her marriage quite overcame her, and a sudden suppressed sob roused Aline from her breathless state of attention to anxious movement. The sound brought Fluke into the room,

and that presiding spirit at once decided that the remainder of the history must be postponed until the morrow, or until such time as Madam Rambully should be equal to telling it.

Aline was compelled to restrain her impatience, and to strive to soothe her mother into her usual calm apathy. It was dreadful to see her aroused from it, though Aline felt a strange, wild joy in the consciousness that her mother had so loved and sacrificed herself for her father, and that that father had been a gentleman and a genius.

CHAPTER XI.

ALINE'S FIRST REAL LESSON.

In the afternoon Madam Rambully was better, and able to resume her story.

"Aline," she said, "you have seen all the flowers of my life, I must now show you its thorns and weeds.

"I chose to marry a man, of whose friends, history, pursuits, propensities, temper, or religion I knew nothing at all. I only knew that he was gifted with a handsome person, a genius for painting, a fine voice, and fascinating manner. I loved before I had spoken to him; and when I met him afterwards my love became a blind adoration. I saw no faults, and sought for none. Of course I paid dearly for my folly.

"Before I married Signor d'Aquile it was agreed between us that we should go abroad. I

longed to travel, and he was mad upon the subjects of Italy and painting. Accordingly, as soon as we were married, we started for the Continent, and, in due course of time, reached Rome, where we were to pass the winter.

"At first I was supremely happy. Signor d'Aquile either loved, or pretended to love me, and I needed nothing more to complete my bliss. I was not, however, long in discovering that he had a violent temper, and resolute will. I was first made sensible of this by his cutting to pieces a beautiful picture he had painted, because another artist had chosen the same subject, and treated it, as he thought, better. His passion was unbounded, and when I tried to soothe it he turned it upon me.

"I will not shock you, Aline, by describing the various scenes that I witnessed during the first year of my married life. They then rarely included me, as he strove, for a time at least, to maintain his power over me by a semblance of devotion, but they terrified me greatly. I had never seen my father's stately household disturbed by a gust of passion, and these whirlwinds were all the more frightful.

"However, your father painted and studied,

made artist friends, bought pictures and costly articles of *virtù*, and introduced himself and me into the first society at Rome, before the first twelve months were over. I should have enjoyed it all as much as he did, but for my fear of his violent temper. Still I loved him passionately.

"You were born at Rome, twenty years ago yesterday! What a century of suffering those years seem to have been!

"Shortly after your birth I made the painful discovery that your father never really loved me. The fact dawned upon me slowly, and I was miserable. He saw it, I suppose, and by degrees dropped the mask he wore. I know he admired me, and perhaps would have loved me before he married me, had not some previous attachment been stronger than the one he felt for me. But he wanted money to pursue his darling art, and to gratify his extravagant fancies, and so he accepted my devotion, and pretended to requite it.

"I became reserved and silent to him, as he grew more passionate to me. I stayed at home to weep, he went abroad to amuse himself.

"You were my only comfort, but Signor d'Aquile took no notice of you whatever. He said

he hated children, and if you cried, he got angry with me.

"In one thing I believe he was sincere. He did not care for money, and when he proposed settling my fortune on me, he did so because he took it for granted that I should spend it as readily as he would. But he mistook me. I had worldly wisdom enough to wish to preserve my fortune, or at least a portion of it.

"As long as I believed that he loved me, and as long as he knew how to manage me, I let him spend my money as he would. In short, I made the half of it over to him, and asked no questions about it. I soon discovered that he was as careless in his expenditure as a child, and as long as he had money in his purse, all his friends were welcome to share it.

"It would be tedious and useless to go through the first five or six years of our married life at length, and I suppose I should be wrong to prejudice you against your father more than I can help, so I will pass them over quickly.

"During their course we effectually alienated one another. He was arrogant and over-bearing, and treated me like a dog; I was as determined as he, and treated him with the contempt he

deserved. Sometimes he left me for weeks together, and only returned to extort money from me—and at others we lived together either without speaking at all, or in a continual state of excitement. How he spent his money, I never knew, but he dissipated all he had the power over in this period. The interest of my moiety came to me regularly.

"The next three or four years were fearful years for me. Sometimes he feigned a return of affection, and I, like an insane fool, believed in it, and gave him everything that he asked for; at others, when he came home excited and excitable, to get me to sign some deed or other, to make over sums of money to him, and I resisted—he abused me in a manner that I dare not think of, lest I should even now go mad at the recollection of it.

"We travelled about from place to place, for he was restless and wretched if he remained long in the same spot, and he used to give me his orders to march, as if I were a common soldier and he my captain.

"Meanwhile I was crying myself blind. I sent you to a school as soon as I could possibly part with you, to remove you from the contamination of such scenes, as well as to keep you out of

Signor d'Aquile's way. You can remember the *pension* at which you spent those two unhappy years, from six years of age to eight. Previously to them, I used to send you with an old nurse into a country lodging when your father was with me, so that you can have little or no recollection of him."

"None whatever," said Aline, as Madam Rambully seemed to pause for a reply.

"My income was dwindling down, by degrees, into a third of its original amount. I had long ceased to write to my Aunt Nelly, who had quite lost sight of me, and I began to feel a miserable deserted creature, for whom nobody in the world had any regard. By degrees I ceased to care about anything, and when Signor d'Aquile asked for money, I let him take it; finding it easier to yield passively, than to resist and be abused.

"I believe I am proud by nature. Pride kept me silent when he taunted me; pride alike made me resist all his apparent overtures to a better understanding; and pride finally alienated all my affection from him.

"After eight years of married life, I found he was not only indifferent, but faithless to me. The nurse of whom I spoke just now opened my

eyes to this—at least opened my understanding, for my eyes were already half blinded by tears.

"He had dragged me to Venice—a melancholy old place enough. I had a dull lodging there, with the waters of the lagoon beneath my windows, and the waters of sorrow within them. At first Signor d'Aquile came and went as he liked, we rarely spoke; at last he absented himself entirely.

"One day Rosetta saw him and a beautiful Italian woman in a gondola. She said nothing of this to me, but she watched, and set some friends she had at Venice to watch and make inquiries, until she found out that he was said to be actually about to be married to this lady, who was from Florence, where we had spent the previous winter, and that I was reported to be dead. She never saw them together again, as the lady left Venice almost immediately, and he, I suppose, either went with her or followed her.

"In due course of time Rosetta told me this. I think I felt glad, for he would not trouble me again,—I certainly was too indifferent to be indignant, and too proud to make myself a public spectacle, as an injured wife. But still, the report told upon me, and I was very ill.

"You were at school, and I had no one near me

but Rosetta and a kind landlady, to whom, doubtless, Rosetta had confided my history.

"One day when I was sitting up for an hour or two, Signor d'Aquile made his appearance. He was in his most amiable and fascinating mood. At another time it would have made my heart beat pleasurably, in spite of my common sense; as it was, it roused every dormant passion of my nature, and stirred up within me a deadly hatred, jealousy, revenge, that I had never felt before.

"But I concealed them, and allowed him to approach me and see how ill I was, and remark upon my appearance with some, I think, real commiseration in his manner. In a little time, I so far mastered my feelings, as to ask him where he had been, and what he had been doing.

"He said he had been on a sketching expedition amongst the mountains; and that he had been so entirely out of the way of post-offices, that he had been unable to write to me.

"I listened with patience, and pretended to be amiable. I was determined to play the play out.

"He was so agreeable all that night and all the next day, that I began to think Rosetta's story must be false, and that love and pity for me were

again in his breast; but I steeled myself against all softening.

"The second day the secret of his changed manner was disclosed in the usual way. He wanted money—the power over the half of my remaining income.

"I shall not stop to tell you all the arguments he used to prove to me that if I consented to this, he should soon double or treble the money by the purchase of pictures, and one scheme and another. I let him talk on, and pretended to be about to yield.

"At last he produced a paper, prepared for the occasion, and requiring only my signature to convey the said capital into his hands. He was about to embrace me, as he gave it to me, when I repulsed him with a cry that sent him backwards in affright.

"I felt a sudden strength in all my limbs, and stood up to hurl his falsehoods and faithlessness at him.

"I don't know what I said; I was in such a fury of passion that my own words nearly choked me. I told him all I knew of him and all I had heard, poured out all my wrongs and his injuries, and finally declared that I hated him with such an

implacable hatred, that he might murder me before I would ever again make over one farthing of my money to him.

"I could not tell the effect my words had on him, as my bad sight prevented my seeing the working of his features; but as I wound up my scorn and hate with this declaration, I heard a deadly oath, felt him move towards me, and in another moment received such a blow on my temples, as hurled me, senseless, to the ground.

"I do not know how long I lay, apparently without life. Rosetta found me, as she thought, dead, with a pool of blood close to my head. He had left me thus!"

At this part of her mother's story, Aline could no longer restrain her sobs. She threw herself into her arms, and cried pitifully. It was now Madam Rambully's turn to comfort her child, by telling her that it was all past, and they were together still. When Aline became calm, she continued her history.

"Grief had not killed me, and pain would not kill me. They restored me to life with much difficulty, and as soon as consciousness brought back the remembrance of the past, I ordered Rosetta to pack up everything I possessed, and to

hire a gondola, to take us away from a house, whither Signor d'Aquile might return.

"I made the landlady promise faithfully that if he ever came back to make inquiries for me, she would tell him that she knew nothing at all about me. She hated him so cordially that she would have promised anything.

"She and Rosetta carried me between them on a sofa mattress, like a corpse, to the gondola, at nightfall, and they rowed me, more dead than alive, to a small hotel, where we hired a bedroom, and Rosetta and I remained a few days.

"Signora Pisa, meanwhile, kindly undertook to go and fetch you, Aline, from your school. You can just remember, I think, coming to me at Venice for part of a day and one night, and then leaving it for ever.

"I was still very weak, but I was resolved not to remain within reach of Signor d'Aquile, so we went by tolerably easy stages to a small village in Piedmont, not very far from Turin, where I took a lodging in a farm-house, and remained incognita for some time. I dressed myself in dark blue, and assumed the name of Rambouillet. I had no particular reason for choosing this name, which you think so hideous, but I had been read-

ing a book containing the history of Madam Rambouillet, and it struck me as a good name enough. The change the country people have made in it here is better still. You had hitherto been called Mary. I began to call you Aline. Mary was the name your father gave you. Alexandrina was one of our family names. It is so long and marked a name, that we shortened it into Aline.

"When the first excitement of travelling and change was over, my mind and health gave way together. I was ill and miserable. I hated myself, I hated Signor d'Aquile, I hated life. Had it not been for you, I should have destroyed myself.

"Rosetta was engaged to be married to a young man who would wait no longer for her; so she told me, with regret I believe, that she must return to Venice. At my entreaty she consented to remain with me a month.

"In despair, I wrote to my aunt, and told her all my history, and that I was dying in Piedmont.

"In less than Rosetta's month, Fluke came to me. With her usual calmness and decision of manner, she made her appearance in our lodgings,

and from that day to this has taken on herself the management of everything belonging to me.

"Fluke was my aunt's confidential servant at Ash Grove. She owed everything to Aunt Nelly, who had taken her from the Foundling Hospital when she was quite a child, and had brought her up. She had never seen Signor d'Aquile, so there was no danger of her being recognized, if, by chance, he crossed our path.

"My aunt sent Fluke to me, intending that she should take me back to her: but as I knew Signor d'Aquile would be sure to ferret me out if I were anywhere in my old locality, I positively refused to return thither.

"You were old enough, my dear child, to remember all our wanderings from the time Fluke joined us. You can recollect how we changed our abode in Piedmont, Savoy, and finally in France, till you were eight years old, and how you went to school at each new place, at Fluke's express command. I had no interest in life, but to hide from Signor d'Aquile, and no sooner did an artist of any kind make his appearance in our neighbourhood, than we fled before him as before a pestilence.

"At last my sight grew so bad, and I so painfully nervous, that Fluke urged my going to London for advice. Aunt Nelly managed all my affairs for me privately, and remitted me my yearly dividends, with frequent presents from herself, so we have always had plenty of money, and I am to be Aunt Nelly's heir; you will be rich in your turn, Aline.

"The only English person I ever heard Signor d'Aquile name, and that was casually, was Dr. Dove. He once said he knew him, and that he was a clever oculist. I had still curiosity enough left to wish to find out who, originally, Signor d'Aquile was, so when we reached London, I called in Dr. Dove. He came frequently to see me, and once, as if by chance, I asked him about Signor d'Aquile. He said he had never even heard of any one of that name.

"I was in such a morbidly nervous state of fear, that I would not let Aunt Nelly come up to town to see me, lest she should be watched by some emissary of Signor d'Aquile's, for I knew that he would search for me, because he wanted money.

"I should have returned to the Continent, had not Dr. Dove urged upon me quiet, and English

air, and recommended the bracing air of Dorsetshire. How we came to this place, you know well enough, Aline, and you will now no longer wonder at my resolute seclusion, my blindness, my ruined health, my depressed spirits, my wrecked happiness on earth, and my utter hopelessness of heaven.

"I have now told you all that you have been longing to know, and made you as miserable as I am myself. Blindness is better than sight when one has nothing but ghosts to look at; and ignorance is better than wisdom, when one has nothing but misery to learn. You have begun to know this to-day. You will never be again what you have been. Go now, Aline, and send Fluke to me. We are better apart till you have conquered your agitation. Only one thing I request, henceforth—that you never name Signor d'Aquile to me, and never think of him as my husband, or your father!"

"Oh mother, mother! I must, I must!" cried Aline, rising from her low seat, and with a heavy sob throwing her arms around her mother's neck. "I can now only live to find him, to bring you together, to make these crooked paths straight—to——to——!"

"Go, Aline! I cannot hear this now. Send Fluke to me, and try to recover yourself."

Aline kissed her mother, and went, sobbing, from her presence, sending Fluke to her, as she passed quickly through the adjoining room.

CHAPTER XII.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

Aline ran quickly across the barton, through the orchard, and over brook and meadow, till she reached the lonely chapel amongst the elms. Here she climbed the little gate, and went into the dark graveyard, where she knew she should not be disturbed. At the back of the chapel was a small coppice through which the stream ran, and which she managed to get into by climbing a ruined wall. She sat down on the grass amidst the low wood, and poured out her heart's first real grief to the babbling brook to which she had so often sung her songs of joy. The happy, dancing, sparkling waters, and the merry, carolling birds, now answered to her sobs and tears, instead of to her notes of gladness. The evening sun looked down upon a poor, prostrate, weeping girl,

instead of on the gleesome child of yesterday. Truly had her mother said, she could never be again what she had been.

She lay on the grass amongst the blue-bells, wild hyacinths, and orchises, like a stray lamb bleating and moaning for his mother. She could not stop her sobbing, try as she would. She wept for her unhappy mother—for her lost, forgotten father—for herself! That history had opened the world to her, as she had never seen it before; and displayed some of its dark, ugly corners to her, who had hitherto only wandered in the open daylight of its pleasant paths.

Poor Aline! it seemed as if her heart was breaking—breaking too with love and pity. Oh! the pity for her injured, unhappy mother! the wondering, aching compassion for the strange, bad father! And both were so wrong—she thought. Both acting so directly in opposition to God's word. They who ought to have cleaved to one another, through all the changes of life, to be for ever separated, and hateful to each other. Her own parents too! What could she do? What could she do? What if they were both to die?—and lie like the dust in that quiet grave-yard, only far asunder, until the Great

Day of awaking! It was too horrible—quite too horrible!

Aline fell on her knees, there, amidst the wild flowers, by the dancing waters, under the sheltering trees, with the sunlit heavens above her, and the sun-warmed breezes around her. At first the loud sobs continued; then, by degrees, they subsided into a low wail, and finally ceased. With clasped hands, and upturned, streaming eyes, she knelt long: but again the head and hands drooped low, and the tears watered the grass and flowers, like rain.

Aline prayed as she had never prayed before; and like all those who pray from the heart was, at last, calmed and comforted. One idea, and one hope filled her heart—that of finding her father, and reconciling him to her mother. For this she prayed, and to this end she then and there dedicated her young life, from that twentieth birthday.

Whilst she yet knelt, a man was approaching the leafy chapel she had chosen for her prayers. She did not hear the footsteps that sounded lightly as they trod the edge of the brook, nor the slight exclamation that the walker uttered when he perceived Aline. He stood for a moment

regarding her, from the water's edge, started, advanced, retreated, and seemed about to proceed, when a large, white dog bounded up to him, and gave a sharp short bark.

Aline sprang to her feet in affright, and no sooner had she turned round to see whence the sound proceeded, than the dog ran towards her, and jumped joyfully around her.

"Yeo!" she cried, with a scream of terror.

The stranger was no other than Yeo's master, Lachlan Lyons.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Aline," said Lachlan, coming to Aline.

"Lachlan!" was all she could say, as she put both her hands in his, and again began to weep passionately.

Lachlan had a brave and loving heart, and knew well how to offer comfort on most occasions when sorrow showed itself to him; but this grief of Aline's took from him his presence of mind, and he could only hold her cold hands in his, and let it have way.

Still there was a sense of loving protection and tender pity in that friendly grasp; and Aline's head bent, and her tears fell fast upon those four clasped hands.

There was a small, weeping, silver willow close by the little brook, over which towered a lithe but stalwart ash. The big and full-leaved tree seemed to be protecting the young and drooping one, and might be thought to be looking down in sympathy on the ever-weeping sapling. Thus the tall, manly figure of Lachlan bent over the drooping form of the young girl, as if sheltering her in the rude storm that had just shaken her to the very roots of her existence.

"Oh, Lachlan!" she said, at last; "I am so glad it is you."

She looked up into his face, as she spoke, with the confiding expression of childhood; and as the two pairs of frank, honest eyes met, each knew that a dear old friend was at the side of the other.

"Dear Miss Aline, what is the matter? Can I help you—can I comfort you?" said Lachlan.

"Yes; I think you can," replied Aline. "I think you can find me my father."

Aline's trustful heart knew that she could confide in Lachlan, and with an impulse that she did not even try to resist, or stop to ask whether it were right or wrong, she said the words I have written.

"Only tell me how, and I would go all over the world to find him for you," said Lachlan.

Aline sat down amongst the wild flowers, and Lachlan seated himself near her on a root of a tree.

"I don't know where he is, Lachlan," said Aline, "but I feel sure he is alive somewhere. His name is Signor d'Aquile. He is a great painter. He lives, I think, abroad. I do not know him; I quite forget him. I have only to-day heard my own story; and that is why I am so miserable. My father and mother have ceased to love one another. Oh, Lachlan! it is dreadful. If I could only find him I am sure that I could reconcile them; but no one but their own child could do it; and here, in this valley, I am powerless. You, who are so clever, and travel so much, could help me I am sure. But no one must know that we are trying to find him; not even my own mother. I always feel that you can do everything, Lachlan, I have such faith in you. You have made your own way in the world; you have been the means of making Mr. and Mrs. Oliver Bat happy; you have saved poor Stern; you have taught the ignorant navvies, and helped them when they

were starving; and now God has sent you to help me, the first person you ever saw when you came to Yeo."

Aline's sanguine, happy spirit was brightened at once. She believed what she hoped. Her hero, Lachlan, could do everything. He would find her father.

Lachlan felt astonished and bewildered at the faith he had inspired, and his eyes gleamed with a great joy.

"Thank you for your trust in me," he said; "it is not misplaced. For you, Aline, I would strive against all obstacles, and conquer them. I love you better than all the world beside."

When Lachlan said those words he scarcely knew that he was making a declaration that most women would turn into a proposal. Not so Aline. She looked gratefully at him from her clear black eyes, and said simply—

"Do you really, Lachlan? I have always thought of you, and prayed for you, next to mamma."

Lachlan's face kindled with a pleasure that Aline had never seen in it before.

"Thank you. God bless you, dear Aline!" he said. "If I thought I could be worthy of you in

any way, I would ask you to try to love me better than even your mother; as I love you, and have always loved you. Had you not told me who your father is—asked me to help you—said that you cared for me—I should never have dared to tell you this. But I am no longer a pensioner on the bounty of others. I can work, and earn a living for myself and you. I am now come to survey the branch line to Dorchester, then I am going abroad again. I am to lecture on engineering shortly, and I am handsomely paid for all. If you were with me what could I not do? I could cut through the mountains of the moon, and make a tunnel under the Red Sea."

A strange new joy swelled Aline's heart, and seemed to crush out the late sorrow.

"And I could do anything with you, Lachlan," said Aline. "I always could. We used to be so happy together. But I may not leave mamma, not even for you."

"She could live with you always. We could all live together. And then we could find your father, and conquer the world."

Lachlan's eyes sparkled, Aline's heart beat fast.

"Not if you went abroad, Lachlan."

"Oh, I could find other employment. There is plenty of work to do, so long as one has a stout heart and a strong arm to do it. And for your sake, and with you near me, my heart and arm would be really heart of oak and arm of iron."

"Lachlan, you have made me so happy in the midst of my trouble, that I am ashamed of my own volatile heart. *It* is not heart of oak."

"Let it be always the same tender gentle heart it was when you first made me get into the car, that memorable day at the door of the Royal Oak, since which I have never ceased to think of you, and love you."

"And I of you, Lachlan."

"And will you love me still, dear Aline?"

"Always."

"And you will make me the proudest and happiest fellow in the world? You will give me the right to protect you, and seek your father, as—as—my father, dear Aline?"

Aline shook her head.

"I can never leave mamma, Lachlan, and she will never leave the Downs—not, at least, till we can find my father, and reconcile her to him."

Lachlan's face became less bright.

"You think she would not consent—would not approve of me. If I had the title she would not object, I am sure."

"Oh, Lachlan! no one could object to you. But I am sure she will not consent to part with me."

"You will ask her—you will tell her that I will work night and day to deserve you—that I will make her happy, and love her as you love her."

"Yes; but she will not consent now, I am certain; and I can only think of finding my father."

"And forget me—so soon?—Oh, Aline!"

Aline fixed her innocent eyes on Lachlan's face, and put her little hand in his.

"I shall never forget you, Lachlan. I shall think of you and love you always, wherever you may be. I shall wait for you, and be quite happy in the knowledge that you are thinking of me, but I can never leave mamma. And she will want my love and care more and more every year."

There was silence for a few minutes between the pair, as they sat hand in hand, almost like a couple of children. Aline's eyes were cast down,

Lachlan's were fixed on her. Yeo lay fast asleep at their feet. Aline had forgotten time, and scarcely knew how fast the day was closing. The soft hues of sunset were gradually replacing the bright blue of the June midday skies, and a young moon had arisen, attended by the faithful evening star, and peeped shyly down upon the lover-friends now so happy in each other. The blue-bells and wild hyacinths were beginning to close their open doors, and to fold themselves to sleep, the birds were fast following their example, and only their twittering good nights were heard, as they composed themselves in the trees and bushes around. The very stream had a lullaby murmur, as if it, too, were thinking of rest, or at least complaining that it never got any. A faint low from the kine in the meadow, or a bleat from the folded sheep, or a bark from the shepherd's dog, were the only sounds that disturbed the peace of that sylvan solitude. Very beautiful and most holy are the picture and the calm. As in the heart of nature, so in the hearts of those who had always loved one another, there was peace.

At last—

"God bless you, Aline!" said Lachlan, gently.

"I will never turn you from your duty. I will work and wait."

"I, too, will wait," said Aline, gently.

They rose, still hand in hand, and stood a moment in silence. A nightingale suddenly awoke the stillness of the evening, and aroused the half-sleeping birds to dreamy twitterings. The melody thrilled those hearts of nature and the lover-friends of which we spoke, but it also made Aline conscious of the lateness of the hour.

"I must go," she said, with sudden fear. "What will mamma think? Lachlan, we shall often meet again."

"To-morrow evening – here—to tell me what your mamma says," said Lachlan.

"If I can. If not come to see us. Perhaps that would be best. Yes—I am sure it would. Good night. I will run quickly. You had better not come to-night, mamma is ill. Good night. Good bye."

Aline did not wait for another word from Lachlan, but ran off, leaving him alone with the nightingale.

CHAPTER XIII.

ALINE BECOMES A BONE OF CONTENTION.

FORTUNATELY for Aline, Fluke had been engaged with her mistress ever since she left the house. Madam Rambully had been greatly excited by the relation of her history, and had requested Fluke not to allow Aline to go to her until she went to bed. Accordingly, when Aline returned, she found that Fluke was still with her mother, and that no inquiries had been made for her.

Mrs. Bull was, however, anxiously awaiting her, and had prepared her tea, together with a little lecture upon her late hours.

However, when she saw the traces of tears on her cheeks, and the flush of a strange excitement in her face, the lecture melted into a—

"What is the matter, dear missey?"

"I cannot tell you, granny," said Aline, as she

sat down by the hall-fire, and began to stroke Tom, "but I have seen Lachlan. Did you know he was come?"

"Yes; he arrived at Brooklands yesterday, and this morning he went to the Manor to see them all there. He came here to dinner, and went with grandfather to the hayfield afterwards. They came back to tea. He asked for Madam and you, and I told him your mamma wasn't well, and that you, my dear, was just gone out. There is a fine, clever, gentlemanlike young man he is grown, to be sure. Dear heart! I should never have thought that the rough Australian boy would turn out so. 'Twas like reading a book to hear 'um talk. I learnt more geography in an hour than ever I learnt at Miss Pope's school. He talked about Egypt and Africa as if 'twas Yeo. How I wish he'd take a fancy to Kezia or Kern; but I don't quite approve of cousins marrying, 'tis too near, but I used to fancy he liked Kern. Do you know, my dear, he brought word from my daughter, Mrs. Dove, that Sir John is going to bring my lady and a sight o' company to the Hall? Kern is coming down with them, and then 'tis to be hoped she will settle down at home. Mr. and Mrs. Oliver

Bat are expected about the same time, so Yeo will be all alive again. I must say I shall be glad to see the big pew at the Downs church filled once more, and the house inhabited."

"When are they all expected, granny?"

"Some time this autumn. My daughter Dove told Lachlan that they were coming to London at once. Now drink your tea, there's a dear heart. You look as tired as a hunted hare."

Aline did as she was bid, and then went into the parlour. She sat down on the window-seat, and looking out upon the Downs and the moonlit skies above them, tried to think. She could not. Her mind was in confusion. Visions of her mother and her early life—of her unknown father—of Lachlan—were flitting in and out at every door, and mingling together as in a dream. But at last Lachlan seemed to banish all other forms, and to take possession of the airy chambers.

Fluke suddenly broke in upon Aline's first love-dream. It was an unsentimental awaking.

"Dear me, miss! here alone in the dark nearly. I dare say you've been crying all the evening, and making yourself miserable to no purpose."

Fluke went out and returned with a candle. She drew the curtains without a remonstrance from Aline.

"Bless us, Miss Aline, how you do look. As pale and cold as if 'twas winter."

Fluke took Aline's hands. The girl was chilled by the dews in which she had been lingering.

"You must go to bed. Your mamma is asleep, thank goodness. Now I do 'ope, Miss Aline, you won't torment yourself and her by thinking and talking of that 'orrid Signor d'Aquile. I'm glad you know who you are on the maternal side, and 'ope you'll begin to keep up your dignity now that you are told that your mamma is a baronet's daughter, and your relations, people that nobody in Yeo is fit to wipe the shoes of. 'Tis time that you should treat the Lyons, and Bulls, and that Lachlan, and all the vulgar lot of 'em, as a young lady ought to treat 'em."

"Fluke, I hope I have always done so; and if I were a queen's daughter I should not change my manners towards any of them."

"Then more's the pity, Miss Aline. You don't take after any of your mamma's family, who were 'aughty enough when they chose. As to your papa, thank 'eaven I never saw him.

He must have been of the Nebuchadnezzar kind, I think."

"What do you mean, Fluke?"

"Mad, Miss Aline; though I must say your mamma was enough to turn him crazy, and he enough to turn her crazy."

"Remember, Fluke, he is my father, and I can never hear any one speak against him."

"Is. I 'eartily 'ope and pray he is nobody's fawther now in this world, at least. Take my advice, Miss Aline, and never 'ave anything to do with men. The only really 'appy women I ever knew are your aunt, Miss Auster, and myself."

"Why did you leave her, Fluke?"

"Because she wished it, and I owed everything to 'er. I would 'ave gone to Botany Bay, much less to Italy, to please 'er."

"It is she, I suppose, to whom you write?"

"Yes. She manages all your mamma's affairs for her, and sends you presents, and is very anxious to see you."

"I shall never go to see any one until I have found my father!"

"Well! that is a nice ending to the story! I thought 'ow it would be. There's my lady's bell

again! We shall have no peace for a month at least."

Aline was summoned to wish her mother good-night, and to go to bed.

"Never mention that subject to me again, Aline," said Madam Rambully, as Aline stooped to kiss her.

"Good-night, dear mamma," was all Aline could say.

The mother was soon asleep, but the child had little sleep that night, and arose the following morning restless and unrefreshed.

The morning hours, usually so bright and cheerful to Aline, seemed interminable. She had never paused to consider before how long her mother took to dress—now the toilette appeared ridiculously prolonged. Max barked and Jack called in vain. She did not even notice them. The tame bullfinch piped, and she did not hear him; the sheep bleated on the hills, and Thekla neighed in the paddock in vain. Aline was in the parlour all that long morning, and, for the first time in her life, dreamed it away.

At last her mother came down to dinner. Aline had nothing to say to amuse her. The one was nervously irritable; the other absently silent.

After dinner the former sat in her easy chair, gazing at the hills; the latter on a low seat near her, gazing at nothing at all.

At last:

"Aline, have you nothing to say?" said Madam Rambully.

We will retain her Dorsetshire name for the present.

"Yes, mamma," said Aline with an effort.

"Then say it, for heaven's sake, or I shall go out of my mind."

Aline dashed into one of the two subjects nearest her heart at once, as a young colt dashes at a fence he wants to clear.

She told her mother all that Lachlan had said to her, and effectually prevented her going out of her mind, for that day, at least.

"Rather presumptuous, I must say," said Madam Rambully, when she had heard Aline's somewhat disjointed tale. "How did he venture to begin such a subject, Aline?"

Aline was already in perplexity. She could not tell her mother without reverting to the previous day, or declaring that she had made him her confidant.

"I—I scarcely know, mamma."

"You refused him, of course!"

"I said, mamma, that I could not leave you."

"Was that all?"

"I had no other reason, mamma dear."

"What did he say?"

"That he could work for both."

"Very condescending. And you? I suppose you told him that a navvy engineer was scarcely a match for——"

"I told him, dear mamma, the truth: that I love him better than any one else in the world, and that I will wait for him; but that I can never leave you."

"Aline!"

Madam Rambully's blind eyes nearly opened with surprise.

"You know, dear mother, that I always liked him best, and—and——"

"And he has dared to aspire?"

"Mother, he does not know who we are. I did not know till yesterday; and he loves me."

"True, Aline."

Madam Rambully put her hands before her eyes. Aline put her arms round her neck and kissed her.

"You are not angry, mamma."

"No, Aline; but you cannot marry him. When I am dead you will resume your proper station, and then——"

"Mother, dear mother, I should die too. I do not mean to marry. I never mean to leave you; but I love Lachlan, and he loves me. Do not break our hearts by saying that we may not love one another."

"Oh, Aline! I thought to shield you from this, by bringing you to a place where you would see none but farmers and their sons, and you have fallen in love with one of them after all."

"No, mamma, Lachlan is a gentleman. Only let him come this evening and speak to you himself, and you will confess that he is one."

"If he were only to recover the baronetcy, Aline!"

"Perhaps he may, mamma. But I should not wish it."

"You will not leave me, Aline? I should die."

"Never, never, mamma. Do not cry. I only want your blessing to make me, oh! so happy."

"Aline, I could never consent. A marriage is impossible, and a long engagement out of the question."

"I do not mean to marry or to be engaged—only—only to wait, dear mamma. Will you see Lachlan? He is coming here this evening."

"My dear Aline, it would only discompose me. The thing is utterly out of the question. It is preposterous. The other day he was a common workman."

"Only see him now, mamma; only hear him talk."

"If I see him you will promise to abide by my decision?"

"I cannot promise not to love him—not to be his friend for life—not to be true to him as long as I live; but anything else, dear mother."

"Anything else!" sighed Madam Rambully. "What else?"

"He may come, dear mother?"

"Yes, he may come."

"Will you tell Fluke so?"

The bell was rung, and Fluke was told that her mistress would like to see Mr. Lachlan Lyons, if he came to the farm that evening.

"What next?" growled Fluke, as she turned her back.

Again there was silence between the mother and daughter, as they sat hand in hand, looking

abstractedly at the Downs. The mother's face wore its most painful expression, the child's was working with a strange excitement.

In due course of time Lachlan came to the farm. Fluke announced his arrival, and soon afterwards ushered him into the parlour.

Lachlan blushed as he used to blush when a boy, in finding himself in that room. Aline blushed too, for company, and smiled, and looked at Lachlan, out of those sweet eyes, and then at her mother, as much as to say, "be tender of mamma."

Madam Rambully said, "How d'ye do, Mr Lachlan Lyons," coldly and stiffly,—held out a very straight hand, which Lachlan touched and was silent.

Who was to speak first? Aline.

"Lachlan," she said, quite naturally, "will you tell mamma where you have been, and what you have been doing, since we saw you last—more than two years ago."

"Ah, do, if you please," said her mother, glad of an escape from the impending subject.

Lachlan's voice trembled perceptibly when he spoke, but it seemed to take Madam Rambully by surprise, nevertheless. It was a very clear,

sonorous voice, and the accent and pronunciation were good. He was not at all provincial, and he had quite lost the abrupt shyness that she remembered in him two years ago, and spoke readily and unaffectedly.

"I scarcely know where to begin, I have been so knocked about the world," he said.

"With the very first thing you did when you got back to London," said Aline, fixing her loving black eyes upon him,—as if he could gain courage under such an influence.

"The very first thing I did, was to leave London again, immediately, to survey the ground for a new branch railroad in Sussex."

"In Sussex?" said Madam Rambully.

"Yes, madam. The work was much what I have to do here, but as it was my first actual employment on my own account, as an engineer, I was very anxious about it."

"Did you come across any of the Sussex county gentlemen?—did you cut through any of the old estates?" asked Madam Rambully, getting interested.

"Yes,—we had to battle with several staunch landed proprietors, amongst whom were Mr. Nuneton, of Allerton House, Mr. Auster, of Lee

Park, Sir Philip Hall, of Brierton, and Sir George Sedgland, of Sedglands Abbey. Perhaps you know Sussex, madam."

"Slightly," said Madam Rambully, restraining an exclamation of surprise, at hearing the names of her nearest relations so suddenly spoken. Aline, also, was in the act of remarking upon it, but checked herself.

"Fortunately," continued Lachlan, "I was able to oblige one or two of these gentlemen, without injury to the Company, whose chief engineer Mr. Markman is, and Sir George Sedgland was very kind to me, in return. He not only invited me to his house, but gave me letters of introduction to his son, who was going to travel in the east, and with whom I afterwards made acquaintance."

"You were at Sedglands Abbey," said Madam Rambully, involuntarily.

"More than once, and I have been over every inch of ground belonging to it."

"How strange!" said Aline and her mother at the same time.

"What were the inhabitants like?" asked Aline.

"Sir George is reckoned a proud man, I be-

lieve; but he seemed kindly interested in me, and so I did not find it out. Lady Sedgland was a grand and fashionable lady, of whom I was very much afraid, and the young ladies were very pretty, and elegant, and played and sang beautifully. As it was my first introduction into aristocratic society, I was too nervous and awkward to do anything but listen."

"They have not cut a railroad through the park, surely?" said Madam Rambully.

"No,—This was the little matter in which I was able to oblige Sir George. They were going to do so, but seeing how angry he was, and how annoying it must be to him, I represented that it was quite as easy to cut through some of his outlying fields, and after some demur, it was done. He offered me five hundred pounds to manage it for him, but I could not, of course, take the money.

"When I returned to London, Mr. Markman despatched me at once to Constantinople, where the Sultan would have kept me as one of his own engineers, but I did not like working for a Mahometan, so I declined his offer. Besides, I could not live away from England."

"Why?" asked Madam Rambully, half un-

consciously, as if she was expected to ask a question here and there. Her thoughts were rather at Sedglands Abbey with her cousin and his family, than at Constantinople with Lachlan.

"Because my heart was at Yeo, madam," said Lachlan, jumping at the subject he was longing to begin, much as Aline had done.

Madam Rambully recalled her wandering thoughts, while Aline hid her face behind a vase of flowers.

"I know I am bold even to hope," rushed on Lachlan, "but I have loved your daughter all my life, and if you will give her to me, I will work for her and cherish her, as long as we live."

Lachlan had made so sudden a transition from one subject to another, that Madam Rambully did not at once reply, so he added,

"I am sure of employment. Mr. Markman will secure me work. If I want patronage I may have that too; but I would rather fight on without it. I am going to take out a patent for a new kind of engine I have invented, which will be in the Great National Exhibition next year, and I have a hundred other ways of getting on. Only give your consent, dear madam, to my

marrying your daughter, and I could conquer the world."

Madam Rambully roused herself to speak.

"Aline can always please herself, Mr. Lyons. I never have contradicted her, and I always mean her to do as she likes. If she prefers leaving her mother, and marrying you, I suppose she must do so."

At the beginning of the speech, Aline's arms were round her mother's neck, and Lachlan had seized Madam Rambully's hand—but at the end of it, they stood before her.

"I do not want to leave you, mamma," said Aline.

"You need never be separated, madam," said Lachlan.

"I do not intend to leave this place as long as I live," said Madam Rambully, "and if Aline marries, I shall probably not trouble any one very long."

"Mamma dear, you could be quite as retired and quiet elsewhere," urged Aline.

"You would have four arms instead of two to help you," said Lachlan, respectfully.

"Thank you. I believe you are quite sincere. If it were not for some pride of family, and some

prejudices, I dare say I should be satisfied with Aline's choice."

"Madam, I never asked about your family," interrupted Lachlan. "I knew you were a lady; I felt you and your daughter to be superior to me, but I did not even consider the subject in that light. If I could work my way to my baronetcy, I should only wish to do so to fulfil my father's commands, and place Miss Rambully in her proper sphere."

"If you could," sighed Madam Rambully.

"You would then live with your daughter—with us?"

"No, I should die better satisfied with her lot. I dare say Fluke will take care of me. If Aline is happy my few retrenched pleasures will not matter."

Tears were gathering in Madam Rambully's eyes, and her voice was at its most melancholy pitch.

Aline put her hand into Lachlan's as they stood side by side, and with an effort to restrain her own tears, said cheerfully—

"Mamma, I am not going to leave you. If you are resolved to remain here, I will stay with you. Lachlan will go away and become a great

man, and make us all prouder of him than we are already—and he will come and see us sometimes —and—and I—I can wait."

She turned her loving eyes from her mother to Lachlan. The tears would come as she did so. Lachlan pressed the dear hand, and echoed the words, "Wait! how long?"

"I object to long engagements," said Madam Rambully, "they hamper people, and do no good."

"So do I, madam," said Lachlan, "but here there is no necessity."

"Hush!" said Aline; "mother, that is only a conventional term. I do not think I need any engagement to keep me faithful to my friends. Do you, Lachlan?"

"None," said Lachlan.

"Mother, you do not object to our meeting as friends, as we have always met."

"That could never be," broke in Lachlan. "Madam, you could not."

Aline pointed to the tears in her mother's nearly sightless eyes, and looked at Lachlan entreatingly.

"I feel so very proud," she said gaily, "at being a bone of contention between my two best friends. But I want them to be dear friends, too—

and not to be unhappy or cross on my account. I have had such a happy life here, with you, dear mother; and hearing and thinking of you, dear Lachlan, that you must not make me wretched by being otherwise than friends. You know, mamma, you said you always liked Lachlan."

"Certainly I did; and you know, Aline, that I say you are free to do as you like."

"Yes, dear mother; we will live on quietly here, while Lachlan becomes a great man."

"And then?" said Lachlan.

"God always helps those who do right," said Aline, "and I dare say he will help us."

Aline was kneeling at her mother's knees, holding both her hands, as she said this.

Lachlan bent his tall body reverently over her innocent head, and put his big, brown hand upon her hair.

"May He bless you, Aline!" he said; "you are right,—I, too, will wait."

There was a momentary silence.

"Good night, madam," at last said Lachlan, sadly; "may I come here sometimes while I am in the country?"

"As Aline likes," said Madam Rambully

"We will talk of it another time," said Aline, again giving Lachlan her hand.

He felt that he ought to go, and, accordingly, took his leave, happy and hopeful, in spite of discouragement and maternal selfishness.

CHAPTER XIV.

TROUBLE AMONG THE DOWNS.

After the unusual excitement of the last days, Madam Rambully was very irritable. Aline did her best to soothe her, but the best was not quite so good as usual. She, too, like every one else, discovered that excitement was a terrible destroyer of peaceful enjoyment. Lachlan and her father effectually disturbed her mind between them.

Sunday came—the day of peace. Aline went to church in the morning with Mrs. Bull. The solemn service, and Mr. Raven's sermon, restored to her some portion of the serenity she had lost, but she saw Mr. William Eagles looking at her, and was frightened even in her devotions.

After the service was over, she waited at the church door for Kezia Lyons, and saw Lachlan also. Mr. William Eagles was near them, trying to catch her eyes, but she avoided meeting his.

Mrs. Bull went down to the Manor with her daughter and the "little angels," and Aline, fearing lest Mr. William Eagles should follow her, asked Kezia to walk home with her. Kezia consented, and Lachlan volunteered to accompany them.

Aline often thought, in after days, of that peaceful, happy walk through the meadows and by the sparkling stream. Kezia declared that Lachlan had taken lessons in politeness abroad, he helped them over the stepping-stones of the brook and over the stiles in the meadows so capitally; and Aline's spirits rose, as she felt the protecting presence of one so strong in mind and body.

They lingered in their walk—they sat down upon some felled trees—they rejoiced, like the birds and insects, in the summer weather. Lachlan said he had not had such a walk since he was a boy, and had never been so happy in his life before.

Kezia saw his eyes meet Aline's, and read the secret of his happiness. The bright loving face of Aline flushed with delight, and Kezia saw that she, too, was happy. Why did she sigh so deeply as she pondered over the happiness of these her friends?

"Kern will be back next week," she said, abruptly.

Aline was angry with herself that she could not feel glad.

"I suppose she will be at the Hall," she said.

"I hope not," said Kezia; "I want her at home so much."

"I must take up my abode at Yeominster," said Lachlan.

"What! five miles off," said Aline.

"Either there or at the Royal Oak. The railway will not come nearer Yeo than those two places."

"I am so glad," said Aline. "It will not cut up and disfigure this dear vale."

"It will ornament whatever it passes through," said Lachlan, "and, what is better, unite friends quickly, who are now separated by long distance."

They reached the farm at last, and Kezia and Lachlan returned to Yeo.

In the evening Aline prevailed on her mother to go and sit under the elms by the chapel. An itinerant preacher was to preach there, and the good folks from the Downs and Yeo were flocking through the fields to hear him. They could not see Aline and her mother, in their retreat, but Aline could watch them, and describe them, and their gay Sunday clothes, to her mamma.

When the little chapel was filled, they sat listening to the hymns that came from the human voices within, and united with the hymns of the birds without. Aline joined her sweet voice in the general chorus, and even Madam Rambully sang a low second to the thrilling trebles of the throng of worshippers.

"You know the words, mamma," whispered Aline.

"'Jesus taught me when a stranger;'

I always think they are so comforting. He seeks us, and rescues us, just as John seeks the sheep and lambs on the Downs, and puts them into the fold."

Aline thought her mother was unusually attentive to her little attempt at religious conversation, and would have continued it but she was arrested by the preacher. He was, evidently, a powerful one of his class, and had their usually powerful lungs. The text reached them, twice repeated. It was:—

"Flee from the wrath to come."

As all the windows were open they heard most of the sermon. It was one of strong denunciation, and the preacher enumerated the many vices

to which flesh is heir, in order to tell his congregation what they must forsake and avoid, if they were to escape the "wrath" of his text.

Madam Rambully was frightened. Aline perceived that she trembled. She proposed their returning to the farm, but her mother declined.

The preacher seemed to gather strength with his subject, and thundered forth his words like a veritable Boanerges. At the same time they were good and true words, only more fitted to terrify than comfort the shrinking soul.

Then he went through some of the duties, too often neglected. Amongst others, those of husbands and wives, every word of which came home to Madam Rambully, and she trembled still more. The words were rough and homely, but true. He insisted much on the text, "What God has joined together, let not man put asunder."

"I think you had better come in, mamma," said Aline, rising from her seat.

"No, Aline; I will hear it all. The man doesn't know what a woman has to bear."

Aline stood for a moment, and, turning, perceived Mr. William Eagles standing at the gate of the chapel, also listening. She had never seen him so near the farm before.

"Do come, mamma," she said, but her mother would not move.

She looked again at Mr. Eagles. He had a ghastly expression on his face, and seemed agitated. She did not know whether he could see them or not, but his attention was evidently given to the preacher.

At last the sermon ended, to Aline's great joy. Her mother did not speak, but they remained until the last hymn was sung, and the congregation had dispersed. John Dull and Joan were amongst them. Mr. Eagles did not go with them.

Madam Rambully rose, and Aline perceived that he made a step in advance.

"Good evening, Miss Rambully," he said, coming forwards. "I have a message for you from my sister. May I deliver it?"

A shriek from Madam Rambully pierced the solitude.

"Aline! Aline! save me! hide me! for God's sake hide me!" she said.

"Mother, that terrible sermon has frightened you," began Aline; but Madam Rambully ran wildly away from her child, towards the brook that crossed the road, heedless of her blindness.

Aline followed her, but not quickly enough to prevent her stumbling against one of the stepping-stones, and falling into the water. She fell flat across the little stream, and Aline tried in vain to raise her. She called aloud for help, and Mr. Eagles was at her side. One large stone had evidently caused the fall, and another was close to her mother's head, as she lay, motionless, on her face.

Mr. Eagles took her up in his arms. She was quite insensible, and there was blood on the blue veil. He carried her to the nearest patch of grass, and was about to put her down upon it, when Aline cried, "To the house, if you please. At once to the house."

He hurried across the barton, followed by Aline.

"This way, if you please," said Aline, as they reached the door.

She preceded him through the passage and up the stairs to her mother's room, calling "Fluke" repeatedly as she went. She suddenly remembered that she had made Fluke promise to go and meet Mrs. Bull, while she and her mother were under the elms.

"Put her on the bed—I will be back in one moment," she said, and left the room.

Mr. William Eagles did as he was bid. Then he at once untied the bonnet strings, and cut the strings of the veil and shade. Blood streamed from the temples, and the fair curls were wetted by it. William Eagles always turned sick at the sight of blood. Now he grew ghastly white, and gave a cry, almost as shrill as that uttered by Madam Rambully. He, too, seemed about to faint, for he stumbled and almost fell upon the lifeless body he had placed upon the bed. He spoke the name of that Great Being in whom he professed not to believe, and tried to rouse himself. He could not. He was gazing idiotically on the pale bloody face, and muttering unintelligible words, when Aline returned.

She had been down stairs, and had found Farmer Bull and Lachlan in the hall. She was looking so white, that she frightened them. She said,

"Mamma has fallen and hurt herself. Will you go at once for a doctor? Go by the meadows, and you will meet Fluke. Tell her to make haste."

Lachlan went.

Aline scarcely remarked the great agitation of Mr. Eagles. She got salts and restoratives before

she even looked at her mother. Then she saw the blood. Terrified, but calm, she went for handkerchiefs, and tried to stanch it.

"Hold this bottle to her nose, whilst I do this," said Aline, putting the salts-bottle into the trembling hands of William Eagles. "Hold the basin, if you please," she added, as she dipped the handkerchiefs into cold water, and washed the blood from the temples, and bathed them.

"She is not dead—say she is not dead," groaned the man, who was always nervous as a child at the sight of pain, and had never been with a dying person.

"I don't know," said Aline. "Daddy, Daddy, come and help us," she added, as she heard a footstep in the passage.

Farmer Bull appeared. He had not been in the same room with William Eagles since he forsook his daughter Mary, twenty years before. But he scarcely noticed him, or was aware of his presence, he was so alarmed at the sight of the apparently dead lady.

He began at once to help Aline, and took the bottle and basin from the hands of William Eagles, whose teeth were chattering in the strangest manner, as he stood gazing on that

horrible red blood. He was muttering the words "Twice—twice—murdered," but neither of his companions heard them.

At this moment Fluke and Mrs. Bull appeared, in great hurry and consternation.

"You had better come away with me," said farmer Bull, giving William Eagles a push, and perceiving, for the first time, who he was.

"I cannot—I will not."

"You can—you shall."

"Aline—may I—can I. Heavens, what shall I do?"

"Come with me," said Mr. Bull sternly, laying hold of his arm, and forcibly drawing him from the room.

"Go down stairs, sir," said the farmer. "Are you going to kill another sweetheart? or what has brought you into this house?"

William Eagles recovered his senses. Blood was no longer before him.

He went down stairs, and was going to rush out of the house. Mr. Bull stopped him.

"Not so fast. You and I have an account to settle. I did not go to look for you—you weren't worth the trouble; but as you have come for me, we'll make it up. Perhaps you don't remember

the little debt, but I do. Zounds, man, don't stand chattering there like a lunatic."

William Eagles stood in the hall, shivering as if it was December, and looking like a scared ghost. He did not seem to hear what Mr. Bull was saying, so the farmer took hold of his arm with the gripe of a man used to wield the flail and the scythe, and shook him heartily.

"Now, scoundrel that you are, you baint going to insult and laugh at me in my own house. You shall listen—listen, do you hear?" and he shook him again.

"I do—I do. Let me alone, for God's sake!"

"Don't use that name, you vagabond. Tell me where you have been, breaking hearts and deceiving women these twenty years, and how you dare show your face in this house again."

"Come out of it, and I will hear you," said William Eagles, breaking loose from Mr. Bull, and striding out of the house by the garden-door. Mr. Bull strode after him.

"I'm not going up the Downs this time o' night," he said, catching him at the wicket-gate. "Come down here."

He again griped his arm, and led him down to the bower of honeysuckles, by the stream already

described. It was here that William Eagles last parted from Mary Bull. The sunset was shadowing the hills, and giving a hundred tints to the trees, the moon was rising, and looking into the bower, then as now.

"Go in there and sit down," said farmer Bull.

William Eagles obeyed mechanically. Mr. Bull sat down opposite him. These were strange and unusual scenes for that quiet farm. This sabbath-evening was not the ordinary sabbath of the farmer and his family. So he felt even in his wrath.

"If it wasn't Sunday," he began, "I believe I should a' knocked you down, William Eagles, but I have words that will do it, if anything will."

"Be quick—be quick," said William Eagles. "I shall die in this place. I tell you I shall die."

"So much the better. Do you see my daughter, Mary, as I do, wandering about this garden, picking flowers, or setting 'em? Do you hear her singing, as I do, sweeter and a deal blither than the nightingales in yonder coppice? Do you remember, as I do, how beautiful she

was—how good—how tender—how loving? Can't you fancy her this moment, as I can there, under the moonlight, or here under these roses, with her lover by her side, fairer than the moon, and brighter than the rose? Her lover! that grand and clever *gentleman* that was to go away and win fame and fortune, and all sorts of fanciful fooleries for *her* sake, and come back and marry her? Can't you see her, William Eagles? By heavens, I can. There, as plain as ever I did in my life. Look, sir, look."

Farmer Bull stood up and pointed to something among the trees. It was a strong gleam of moonlight that fell upon the branches of a silver willow by the brook, which, amid the darker trees, seemed, literally, to the excited fancy of the farmer, to be a spirit.

William Eagles groaned, and covered his face with his hands.

A cloud passed over the moon, and the silver willow became itself again.

"Can you tell me, William Eagles, why she never married? Why all the young men in the Vale asked her in vain? Why she always went to a certain tree by the brook, and to a certain hollow in the Downs, day after day, week after

week, year after year, looking for somebody? Why she always wore blue ribbons in her hair, and a blue necklace round her neck, even when her hair was turning white, and her young beauty was going? Why she asked to have a lock of black hair, and the pictur' of a man buried with her, and why she said to me on her death-bed, 'I know he loved me, father, but he is dead, and so couldn't come back.'"

At these words, farmer Bull's voice trembled, and he paused.

William Eagles suddenly fell on his knees before him, and, with a sharp cry of agony, said—

"If you have any pity left, stop, I can bear no more. I repent—I have sinned—I know I am a demon—but I die—I die!"

"Right—right," said Mr. Bull, firmly, unflinchingly. "We have settled our accounts now. Let me never see thee more."

He gave a sort of kick to the half prostrate man, and left him. But turning round, he saw him absolutely fallen upon the earth. He went into the house. Lachlan was in the hall, walking up and down in great agitation. He had just brought Mr. Perch, and sent him upstairs.

"Lachlan," said farmer Bull, "take some brandy from the cupboard, and go out into the bower, and give it to that man, and take him away from this place instantly. There is a curse wherever he goes."

Farmer Bull gave the brandy to Lachlan.

"In the bower, I say—dost hear?" he said, fiercely, and winding up with an oath which Lachlan had never before heard from his lips.

Lachlan went out of the house as commanded. He found William Eagles on the floor of the bower apparently in a fit. He raised him, and poured some brandy down his throat. He revived instantly, but looked so wildly about him that Lachlan thought he was mad.

"Let me go. Let me go, I say. Away, away from this place, where I murdered them all."

He got up, staggered, and half fell again. Lachlan supported him. He walked a few paces out of the bower, staggering like a drunkard.

The moonlight streamed down again upon the silver willow.

"There she is! there she is! Mary! Mary!" he cried, and again nearly fell upon the path.

Lachlan took him by the arm and held him up. His face was now towards the farm-house. There

were lights in Madam Rambully's rooms, and figures moving to and fro.

"Is that—is that their room! Hers! Ah! I murdered her—twice murdered, by heavens. Two of them! Worse than Cain. Let me go—let me hang myself—let me get rid of this wretched life."

He burst away from Lachlan, and with a violent effort ran through the garden, and some way up the Down. Here he fell prostrate.

Lachlan was soon by his side. It was by this time past ten o'clock, and the night was cloudy, so that the moon sailed in and out of the clouds at intervals. She was already behind one, and Lachlan could only see the objects about him indistinctly.

"Let me help you home, Mr. Eagles," he said, gently.

"Nothing to—do—with—Bulls—or—Lyons," gasped William Eagles, trying to rise.

Lachlan helped him up, he resisting as much as he could.

With great difficulty Lachlan got him on the top of the Downs. Here he sat down, declaring that he neither could nor would go any farther.

"You must try," said Lachlan, decidedly, "or I shall go to Mr. Bull for help."

"I vow you shall not. Boy! what do you want with me? I am a murderer, I tell you. A Cain. Fly, fly!"

Lachlan had great muscular strength, so he once more laid hold of William and made him get up.

"Now lean on me," he said. "If you do not I will call at the top of my voice, and bring up all the people from the farm. If that does not do, I have a railway whistle that they are sure to hear."

How Lachlan managed to get his companion along he could not tell. He was like a dead log, clinging to his arm and hanging on his shoulder. At last Lachlan found that he was literally dragging him, and that the muttered curses and maundering mad sentences, gradually ceased. Luckily they had reached the gate that led out of the Downs into the road. When Lachlan was opening the gate, William Eagles again fell down, and Lachlan found that he was powerless to rise. They were still ten minutes' walk from the Nest. Lachlan dragged him through the gate. He was evidently insensible.

There was not a light to be seen, nor a sound to be heard in the village; all the inhabitants were at rest, or, at least, in bed. There was nothing to be done but to go to the Nest for Mr. Eagles.

As he was going he heard a man's footstep, and called for assistance.

"Lachlan, what is the matter?" said Mr. Eagles himself, who was getting anxious about his son's absence, and had walked down the lane to look for him.

Lachlan explained matters briefly.

Mr. Eagles ran to the gate, and found his son lying as Lachlan had left him.

The two men took William by the legs and shoulders, and carried him to the Nest in silence.

Arrived there they shouted for Jenny and her candle. A ghastly sight was William Eagles, and Jenny shrieked with terror as the light of the candle fell upon his livid face, and blood-stained shirt and handkerchief. Lachlan perceived that there was blood, also, upon his coat and hands.

They carried him in, and laid him on a sofa. They found that the blood came from the mouth. He must have burst some blood-vessel.

"Run for Mr. Perch, Lachlan," said Mr. Eagles.

"He is at the Downs," said Lachlan. "Madam Rambully is very ill."

"Good heavens! what shall we do? Bring cold water, Jenny. Perch must come. He is dead or dying. Go, Lachlan, I entreat you!"

"And leave you alone?"

"Yes."

Lachlan unfastened William's handkerchief, opened doors and windows, and threw cold water over him, until he partially revived. When he saw him open his eyes, he said he would go down into the village and see if Perch were returned. If he could not find him he would either come back himself, or send some one else, in ten minutes at farthest.

Lachlan ran with all speed to the Manor. He thought it possible that some one might be still up, expecting him, as he was to sleep there that night. He found Kezia in the parlour, reading.

He soon explained matters, and she did not hesitate a moment to go to the Nest. She merely went to the servants' bedroom to tell them whither she was going, and left the house with Lachlan. He walked with her to the turning up the lane that ran down to Mr. Perch's house. He had not returned from the Downs.

Lachlan's next thought was Mr. Raven. He went on to the vicarage. There was still a light in Mr. Raven's bedroom window. Lachlan knew that he was always ready at the call of a parishioner. He threw some light gravel up against the window, and Mr. Raven looked out. Lachlan told him what was the matter, and asked him to go to the Nest while he went to the Downs. Mr. Raven promised to go instantly, and to take some medicines with him. Lachlan, satisfied that he had done all that he could for the one patient, ran on, with an agitated mind, to learn what had happened to the other.

CHAPTER XV.

MADAM RAMBULLY CHAINED TO THE FARM.

It was past midnight when Lachlan re-entered the farm. All were still astir there. Mr. Bull sat alone in the hall, anxiously waiting and listening. He had the large Bible and Prayer-book before him, but he was too excited to read.

"Lachlan, my boy, I'm so glad thee'st come back," he said, jumping up and shaking hands with him.

"How is Madam Rambully?" said Lachlan, almost dreading the answer.

"She's come to herself, but Doctor Perch thinks she's broken her leg. She's in agonies o. pain, and her mind seems wandering; so grandmother says. The dear child's as white as a sheet, but calmer than you or I."

"Thank God that she's alive," said Lachlan, relieved of one load. "Can I see Perch? There is another sudden accident—William Eagles is dangerously ill. He has broken a blood-vessel, I am afraid, and there isn't a moment to lose."

"That's my doing," said Farmer Bull, terrified but stern. He took off his shoes, crept up stairs, and called his wife. They came down to the hall together, followed by Mr. Perch. Lachlan hastily explained what had happened.

There was a horse ready saddled in the stable, on which John Dull was to ride to Yeominster for a physician. Mr. Perch said he would ride it to the Nest and be back again in half an hour. He told Mrs. Bull what to do for the patient meanwhile. Mr. Bull went out with him to the stable, and Mrs. Bull told Lachlan that Madam Rambully was in a very strange state.

"When she came to herself, poor soul," she said, "she looked about her—I always say 'look,' God help her, and she can't see—but her blind eyes wandered round and round, as if she could see, and then she said to Mrs. Fluke, 'Hide me, hide me, till I can go away from this place, hide me.' When she knew that I was there she seemed to recollect herself, and was quiet. Missey, dear

heart, kissed her, and soothed her; and said that she had heard a sermon that frightened her; and by degrees she became more sensible. But with the sense came the pain. Dr. Perch says the leg is broken, but she won't hear of his setting it; and, indeed, Miss Aline hasn't much faith in him, so they are going to send for Dr. Martin."

Here Mr. Bull came in.

"Now, Lachlan, tell me what happened to that man," he said.

Lachlan told him exactly.

"How he got hold of madam," said Mr. Bull, when he had heard the story, "I can't tell. I found him in the bedroom, mouthing like an idiot, and doing nothing. Grandmother, I eased my mind in the bower where he used to court Mary, and I've had a load the less on it ever since. But doubtless I brought on the fit, or whatever it was. He looked as mad as a March hare."

"Grandfather, you don't mean that you fought the man in your own garden, of a Sunday?" said Mrs. Bull.

"No; I knocked 'un down by words, not blows. But I'm sorry for old Eagles."

"If he should die, his death would be on your head," said Mrs. Bull, in affright.

"Just as our Mary's is on his," said Mr. Bull.

"No, no, grandfather; not so. God took her in His own time. She had her cross to bear, dear heart, she wears her crown now. She loved William Eagles—she never forgot him—but he did not kill her. Oh, what a Sabbath this has been! Is it for you or I—aged sinners ourselves, needing pardon—to take the judgment of the Lord out of his hands, and slay a man to his hurt? I shall never rest again if anything happens to that man from your hand. Do you think you were the cause of this accident? Was he, Lachlan, say?"

"I think Mr. William Eagles is in very delicate health—has disease of the lungs; and that some strong excitement must have brought him to the state in which I found him," said Lachlan. "But the actual bursting of the blood-vessel was probably caused by his running up the hill so violently."

"It don't matter what caused it," said farmer Bull, "'tis done, and can't be undone, and he deserves worse. But I say again, I'm sorry for his father, and Mrs. Bat away."

"Granny! will you come up-stairs for a few

minutes?" said the low voice of Aline in the passage, and Mrs. Bull went.

Lachlan went to Aline, who remained a moment in the passage, and said, "Only one word;" and she followed him into the hall.

"Mamma is better, Lachlan," said Aline. "I thought she would have died."

The tears flowed fast down the pale face. Lachlan took her cold hand, and asked her if she was very frightened still.

"No, I am not frightened. God is with me—and you are here, Lachlan. But it is very strange and dreadful. Mamma insists on leaving this place instantly, and talks, in a wandering, frightened way, of some voice she heard."

"But you cannot leave this place?"

"Impossible, if mamma's leg is broken, as Mr. Perch says it is. It is such a comfort to speak to you, Lachlan, and to know that you feel for me."

"As deeply as I love you, Aline."

"You will not go far away while mamma is so ill?"

"Not farther than I can help—but I shall be engaged all day long."

"I shall feel that you are near me. There is strength in that!"

"God bless you, my Aline!" said Lachlan, as he looked into the weeping eyes of the so lately happy girl.

"And you, Lachlan," said Aline. "Now, I must go."

She smiled at Lachlan through her tears, as she put her hand in his.

"Take care of poor Mr. William Eagles, till Mrs. Bat comes back, for the sake of Mr. Eagles as well as his own."

"Take care of yourself, Aline, for my sake. Your trouble is my trouble, your mother, my——"

Lachlan hesitated, but the trustful eyes that met his, told him that Aline, too, considered her mother as his mother.

"God bless her!" said Lachlan, as she went away; "and teach me how to help her, and do what is right for her as well as for myself."

Morning soon dawned, and the first rays of the rising sun looked down upon the troubled farm-house. The servants were the only people in it who got any sleep that night.

Mrs. Bull came down to Lachlan to say that madam's fever was increasing, and that she wished Mr. Perch would return.

"He has been gone longer than half an hour, and Dr. Martin has not been sent for," she said.

"Let me go for him," said Lachlan, thankful for something to do. "I can saddle Brown Bess, and be at Yeominster in a quarter of an hour."

Mrs. Bull assented, and Lachlan did as he proposed, begging Mrs. Bull to tell Aline where he was gone. Brown Bess had never gone so fast before. She was made to gallop till she was fairly out of breath, that fine June morning.

All Yeominster was asleep when her hoofs rattled through it, and Dr. Martin slept too. But he was used to be called out of his bed at much more uncomfortable seasons than at two o'clock of a summer morning; so he did not feel quite so irritable as he sometimes did on similar occasions.

In less than a quarter of an hour Brown Bess and Lachlan were returning to the Downs with a fine grey mare and a kind-hearted doctor for company.

"I think I have seen you before," said Dr. Martin, breaking in upon Lachlan's dream of Aline, as last he saw her.

"My name is Lachlan Lyons," said Lachlan, rousing himself.

"Then I am very glad to meet you again. I heard one of your lectures at Yeo, about five or six years ago. I hope the world goes well with you."

"Very, thank you."

"May I ask what you have been doing?"

"Engineering in all its branches."

"There is a chance for you in this county. Lord Yeominster is going to build a handsome bridge across the Yeo, and offers it for competition."

"Really! I have had a plan of such a bridge ever since I was down here years ago. I will try for it."

"May I ask what your present employment is?"

"Surveying the new line for Mr. Markman, who will contract for it, if the bill passes. Is Lord Yeominster in the county now?"

"No; but he is expected for a few days, shortly."

Lachlan feared that the conversation was slackening their pace, so he put spurs to Brown Bess, who galloped off, followed by the doctor's grey.

They were soon at the farm, and met by Mr. Perch.

"How is Mr. Eagles?" asked Lachlan.

Mr. Perch shook his head.

"Another case within a mile, for consultation, Doctor," he said, as he led the way to the house, leaving Lachlan with the horses.

John Dull was astir before the usual time, and came to take them.

Lachlan found Mrs. Bull in the hall, looking very much fagged. He asked for her patient.

"Her mind is so confused that one can't tell what to make of her. But you had better go to ed, or we shall have you laid up, too."

"I have an appointment at ten, at the Royal Oak. If you will let me lie down for an hour or two, perhaps it would be best."

"And then take Brown Bess, mind you."

"I can't be back here till night, if then."

"Never mind. Take her all the same. Go to the spare room."

Lachlan obeyed, and Mrs. Bull went to rouse Joan and her other handmaiden, for their morning work.

"Lawk, missus! how you do look!" said Joan. "Do 'ee go to bed. Polly, and John

Dull, and I'll milkey; and do zo well as if you was up."

Mrs. Bull could not be easy to go to bed, however, so she went to Mrs. Fluke, who was standing in the passage for a few moments, while the doctors were with her mistress.

"Well! this is the very worst thing that could have happened," said Fluke. "How in this world she could 'ave met that black-bearded, frightful man, I cannot imagine. That comes of my attending to Miss Aline's nonsense, and leaving her. After such a sermon as those Methodists preach, frightening the very soul out of the body of a nervous woman, to fall in with that igeous, ghastly man, was enough to terrify her out of her wits: and my word! they've done it. The best we can now 'ope is, that she 've reelly broken her leg, and so won't be able to move for months."

"Mrs. Fluke, you speak very unfeeling," said Mrs. Bull.

"I always speak as I feel, ma'am," said Fluke. "But I'm very sorry that we should have made such a commotion in your 'ouse, Mrs. Bull, which, I must give you the credit to say, is the quietest I ever was in in my life."

"Oh! for that, Mrs. Fluke, we must take things as they come, in this world. The roughs with the smooths."

Madam Rambully's door opened, and the doctors came out. Fluke went to her, while they retired for consultation.

"Fluke!" she said, in a very excited manner; "remember that I will die rather than have my leg amputated. And I still tell you, Fluke, that I am convinced I heard Signor d'Aquile's voice, and felt his presence. I was ill with fear all the time of that horrible sermon. Let the preacher say what he will, it cannot be my duty to live with a man who would have murdered me. I shall go mad if I cannot get away from this place. Fluke, tell me if you can guess who it was that spoke to Aline?"

"Law, ma'am; I assure you it was all your fancy. The preacher was hollowing out all that stuff, and you were frightened, and thought you heard a voice."

"Mrs. Fluke, you are wanted," said Mrs. Bull, taking her place by the bedside, while Fluke went to the doctors.

Aline came out of her bedroom as Fluke went down the passage.

"Well, Miss Aline, I must say you *air* aggravating," said the latter. "I thought you were faust asleep."

"I cannot sleep, Fluke, but I am rested, now. What does Dr. Martin say?"

"I am going to hear, Miss Aline. But I don't see why we should 'ave two sick people instead of one. You look as ill as your mamma."

"You need not fear for me. I shall go with you to see Dr. Martin."

"Indeed, miss, you shaun't do any such thing!"

"Then I shall go alone," said Aline, decidedly, and passing Fluke she ran down stairs to the parlour, where the doctors were.

"What do you think of my mother, Dr. Martin?" she asked, abruptly.

"Hem! Well, my dear young lady, she must have her leg set, and then I hope all will be well."

"She has broken it, then?" said Aline.

"Yes; that is to say, we are afraid."

"If you would tell me the exact truth, I should be glad, because mamma will be more likely to attend to what I wish than to any one else," said Aline, calmly.

Dr. Martin looked into the steady eyes of the pale girl before him, and understood her at once. He put his hand gently on her shoulder, and said—

"My dear, your mother has had a bad accident. It is a compound fracture, and if we can set the bone, great care, quiet, freedom from worry, and attention will be required to bring her round."

"She must on no account move from this place?" said Aline.

"Good heavens! no. It would be death. She must not even move from her bed till—till—we allow her, in short—and we must keep her mind easy and amused, if possible. Poor lady! her sight is much against her!"

"Oh, sir, I think I can be instead of eyes, if you can only save her from lameness as well. Both would be very hard to bear."

Aline's eyes filled with tears.

"Do you think, my dear, that you could prevail on her to have the bone set at once?"

"I will try," said Aline, leaving the room, and taking with her the hearts of both the doctors.

Mr. Perch's whiskers were greatly manipulated until her return.

She found her mother very excitable.

"How could you leave me, Aline?" she began; "those men will kill me. And I insist on your telling me who it was that spoke to you after that frightful sermon."

"Dear mother, it was a person of whom you know nothing, who spoke to me. I will tell you all about him when you are better. But if you would compose yourself to have the bone set that seems to have been put out by your fall, it would be such a comfort to me."

"And you will leave me with those men and Fluke, Aline?"

"No, mamma, I will not leave you."

"Was it not enough to be blind without all this agony? It is torture, Aline. I cannot move an inch without excruciating pain."

"Dear mother, it will be better when it is set. May I call the doctors?"

"No, you must not go away. You will leave me for that boy—that navvy—that Lachlan Lyons. I know you will do as I did, and I should deserve it."

"No, dear mamma, I will never leave you. You believe me, do you not?"

"I don't know, Aline. If I am to submit to greater pain I cannot bear it. I will take the

chloroform I heard them proposing. I don't think I should care to die from chloroform. But that dreadful sermon!"

"Law, ma'am," here broke in Fluke, "anybody can preach sermons. The doctor says that the sooner you let him come the better. The sooner you have your leg set, the sooner we shall be able to think of moving: you know it is impossible you can move till you are better."

"Very well, Fluke, let them come."

Poor Aline shuddered as the doctors entered the room.

"You had better go away, my dear," said Dr. Martin.

"You need not be afraid," said Aline. "I shall be quite firm. I cannot leave mamma."

Fluke made an angry gesture, and pointed entreatingly to the door. Aline shook her head.

"Give me the chloroform," said Madam Rambully.

Twelve years ago chloroform was not so generally used in the country as now, and even the medical men were chary of incurring the responsibility of employing it. Fluke was set against it, so was Mrs. Bull, and Aline was frightened

at its name. However, Mrs. Rambully could not be induced to submit to any sort of operation without it, and Dr. Martin, who had brought a bottle with him, consented to her taking it.

Under its wonderful influence, Madam Rambully's excitability calmed, and she soon lay in the trance of chloroform-induced insensibility.

Rigid and pale, Aline watched the effects of this blessed potion. Her heart ceased to beat, and her eyes were fixed on her mother's face, as it underwent the change from life to something almost worse than death.

However, the worst part of the operation was performed without pain to the patient, and when they recalled her to herself it was only to be conscious of the splintering and binding up of the damaged limb. She cried, and was slightly hysterical, but experienced no other ill effects from the chloroform. Poor Aline, who had promised so much, was unable to perform the whole. When it was all over, she was obliged to leave the room.

She went down stairs and found Lachlan, who could not sleep, awaiting her. He took her for a few minutes into the garden. The morning air, the early songs of those early risers—the

birds, the scents of the flowers, the sounds of farm-work, once again renewing, and all the joyous excitement of the birth of another day, had their usual wholesome influence on the cheerful spirit of Aline. Tears came from the dry eyes, and hope and calm came with them. She smiled at Lachlan through the tears, and said her mother would get well she felt sure. She begged him not to look so anxious about her, as she was neither unhappy nor tired, and then she sat down in the little honeysuckle-arbour, where two very different people had sat the previous night, and began to question Lachlan about Mr. William Eagles.

When he told her all he knew she said that she felt sure that he was mad. Then she made Lachlan promise to see to him and his father, and to thank him for bringing her mother home.

"Aline, you must have nothing to do with that man," said Lachlan, scarcely conscious that he was dictating to one over whom he had no power. "He is a bad man."

"I shall do him good, if I can, Lachlan," was Aline's reply.

"You cannot do such a man good."

"I will try. But now I must go to my mother. I mean to have my way, sir, so you need not frown. You have two big lines between your eyes already."

"They will soon smooth out now, Aline. One moment more—only one—to listen to that lark with me."

Hand in hand they stood under the honeysuckles, the morning song of the lark entering into their united hearts, as the evening song of the nightingale had done a few evenings before.

"That is my emblem of hope," said Aline, as they each gazed up into the sky.

"Always higher and higher," said Lachlan. "I, too, will hope."

And so love and hope rose, as the song of the lark died away in the distant skies, in those young hearts. In spite of all the toil and care the day would surely bring to each, they were more than strengthened for them. The birds among the thatched eaves of the farm on their right, the sheep bleating on the Downs on their left, the bees buzzing in the honeysuckles above them, and the butterflies flitting among the dewy flowers, were not less fearless of future pain or grief, than they. Such snatches of happiness in

the midst of sorrow, do, indeed, strengthen the weary mind, and enliven the fainting heart. For the moment that garden of the Downs Farm was an Eden, and Lachlan and Aline its sinless Adam and Eve.

CHAPTER XVI.

LACHLAN LECTURES HIS GREAT AUNTS.

LACHLAN was at his appointment at the Royal Oak at ten o'clock. Here he had consultations with several country gentlemen, amongst whom was Mr. Bat, who were engaged to meet him about the new branch line in which they were interested. He had to walk, and talk, and explain, and persuade, more than my readers would care to hear, after which he returned to a good luncheon at the Royal Oak, provided by Mr. Bat for him.

That gentleman lunched with him, but the rest went away.

"I think we have settled matters pretty amicably," said Mr. Bat, as they sat together at table. "For my part I don't want to make a fortune out of the contractors, and they are

welcome to a slice of my land at a fair valuation. So says Nicholas. I don't know what Oliver will say. He comes to-night."

"I am afraid it will be a melancholy return for Mrs. Bat," said Lachlan. "Her brother is in a very dangerous state."

"Yes, so I hear. And the good folks are getting up a demonstration. Bonfires, fireworks, music, and I don't know what else. It is impossible to stop them. I am quite resolved not to tell Mrs. Oliver to-night. You must come and see her and us at the Lodge."

"Thank you, I shall be very glad. But Mrs. Bat will expect Mr. Eagles to meet her to-night."

"Zounds! I never thought of that. But we must tell a fib for once, and say we wanted her and Oliver all to ourselves the first night. We have built quite a new wing to the house for them. You must come and see it, and my saint-foin. Your uncle is as obstinate as ever about his crops. By the way, I suppose you have heard that the Earl of Inncaster is over head and ears in love with your cousin Kern, and that he followed her to Italy. Mrs. Oliver says she is called *la bella Inglese*, and creates quite a sensation."

"I wonder her head is not turned," said Lachlan. "It was just the same in London."

"And still, Mrs. Oliver says, she will not make up her mind to marry. She is coming down here next week with the Nuxes. I wonder whether the Earl will overlook the farm for the remote baronetcy. Why, what have we here?"

Mr. Bat jumped up from his chair, and went to look out of the window.

"By George, if it isn't the Miss Daws, and Bob Love driving them!" he exclaimed. "This reminds me that the old ladies are coming to attack you about cutting through a corner of a small field belonging to this house—of course you know the Royal Oak is their property. I wish you joy of your encounter. They are stiffer than all the men in the county, and Welchinson was stiff enough to-day."

Lachlan got up to see a carriage and pair drive up to the door of the inn, and to recognize the large bonnets of the Misses Daw and the fantastic hat of their grand nephew.

"They have no love for me as it is," said Lachlan. "I don't know what it will be when we come to dispute about land."

"What can have brought Bob into favour

again?" said Mr. Bat. "He has been cringing, I am sure."

A waiter came in with a card, on which was printed "The Misses Daw." He presented it to Lachlan, and said the ladies wished to know if he were in the house, and would be glad to have an interview with him.

Lachlan went at once to the carriage.

He bowed, and said—

"I am at liberty now, ladies, if you will alight and come in."

"Thank you," said Miss Daw, looking with some surprise at the gigantic young navvy, now appearing very much like a gentleman. She had expected to see him in a smock-frock and fustian trousers. "Are you Lachlan Lyons?"

"I am Lachlan Lyons," was the reply.

"*Sir* Lachlan," whispered Bullying Bob, who had not condescended to bow to Lachlan, and on whom Lachlan had not even glanced.

Lachlan heard the whispered taunt, and said—

"Yes, I forgot. *Sir* Lachlan Lyons, Miss Daw, at your service."

He now cast a glance at the Lieutenant that might have sent him off the box, it was so fierce.

"Ah!" said Miss Daw.

"Ah!" echoed Miss Ann.

"Young man, we will drive to the gate of Five Acres, and survey the ground with you," said Miss Daw.

"Yes. Of Five Acres," said Miss Ann.

"I'm glad to see you," whispered Miss Harriet.

"I'll take you round, Lachlan," said Mr. Bat, who was leaning out of the window, listening.

"Be so good as to tell the landlord to join us immediately," said Miss Margery.

"Immediately!" echoed Miss Ann, in an oracular voice.

"Drive round to Five Acres, nephew," said Miss Margery.

"Mind, Five Acres," said Miss Ann.

The carriage drove off, and Mr. Bat and Lachlan, accompanied by the landlord of the Royal Oak, followed shortly after.

The Lieutenant left the ladies in the midst of five of their paternal acres, and drove the carriage back to the inn, where the horses were put up, and he went into the bar.

The three ladies and the three gentlemen soon met in the field.

"I am resolved," began Miss Daw, "that not

one foot of my property shall be touched by this railroad, which I look upon as a vulgar innovation of every prudent and safe road, since the time of Adam to this time."

"Since the time of Adam!" said Miss Ann, with uplifted hands.

"The Bible says nothing of iron roads, and carriages wheeled along by unnatural means, and stokers, and pokers, and *navvies*," said Miss Daw, casting a withering glance at Lachlan.

"Nothing of navvies," echoed Miss Ann.

"Nor of mail-coaches and four, or even carriages and pairs, and turnpikes, if I remember right, cousin," said Mr. Bat.

"I look upon railroads as the abomination of desolation," said Miss Daw.

"Spoken of—," began Miss Ann.

"Hush, sister! As a disfigurement of a fine county—as a shameful spoliation of ancestral property—as a harbour for all sorts of rogues and adventurers—as the broad road to destruction, in short, Mr. Bat. And I protest that at no price shall any of you have the piece of my land that some former surveyor said would be required."

"If there is an Act of Parliament," said Lachlan, "you cannot resist."

"But I will resist, sir."

"Oh! I beg your pardon. I have been examining all this part of the proposed line, and I see no way of escape of this field and the next."

"And the 'Royal Oak' would drive a capital trade, ma'am, as the 'Railway Hotel,'" said the landlord. "It would increase in vally tenfold in ten years. Especially if you ladies would make the alterations I propose."

"Mr. Tunny," said Miss Daw, "I have already told you that I will have no railway inns, and haunts of bandits on my property. We have been country gentlefolks for generations. I know not when a Daw has not sat amongst the ancient aristocracy of Yeo. Gentlefolks who have driven their horses along good roads, as the Royal Oak has sent forth its posters. I wonder at *you*, Mr. Tunny."

"*You!*" said Miss Ann.

"But posting's all gone to nothink, ma'am," groaned Mr. Tunny. "So well try to bring Noah's ark back again as a mail-coach or post 'orses, when there's a rail."

"More shame for the government and people that will become directors and engineers," said Miss Daw, looking from Mr. Bat to Lachlan.

"But you must understand, young man, that I will not yield one foot of this land to your employers."

"Not one foot," echoed Miss Ann.

"Sisters, you had better not be too positive," said gentle Miss Harriet. "Parliament can do a great deal. Remember Oliver Cromwell."

"I have nothing to do but to survey the line, ladies," said Lachlan. "It would only cut through this corner of the field, and the hedge and ditch of the next. You would be amply compensated by the Company."

"Compensated," cried both sisters at once. "And you *will* not make the road another way. I say, sir, that I insist on your doing so."

"I am only a paid agent, ladies, or I should be happy to oblige you. But if I were to make an angle round one field and escape the other, I should be the means of upsetting the first train, and you would then have an accident on your consciences."

"Better give in, cousin," said Mr. Bat, "as I am going to do, and pocket double the value of your bit of land."

"And let this be a railway hotel, ladies," said Mr. Tunny. "And then maybe you'll let the

fields to advantage for building, and we shall have trade beginning to stir us up a bit. Railways is the road to civilization, as I says."

"Mr. Tunny, you will be good enough to give your advice when it is asked," said Miss Daw.

"When it is asked," echoed Miss Ann.

"I suppose, young man, you are aggrieved at our not taking notice of you when you came from Australia," said Miss Daw to Lachlan; "and that makes you determined to circumvent us now. But I must admit that your conduct in the affair of our poor rooks—"

"Our poor rooks!" broke in Miss Ann.

"Rather spoke in your favour. And we have since heard that you have conducted yourself with credit, and are likely to resemble our poor niece in your demeanour. You will be glad to hear that the rooks are increasing."

"Five or six more!" said Miss Ann.

"Delighted!" said Lachlan.

"I am sure he is quite a gentleman in appearance, sisters," whispered Miss Harriet.

"Too large and rough, Harriet. Don't interfere, my dear; remember your age," said Miss Daw. "But," turning to Lachlan, "if you will give up your resolution to cut into our

property, I am sure we should have no objection to ask you to tea. What do you say, sisters?"

"No objection," said Miss Ann.

"I should be so glad," said Miss Harriet.

Lachlan did his best to restrain a laugh, as he caught Mr. Bat's eye.

"I am much obliged to you, ladies, I am sure; and should feel greatly honoured by a seat at your tea-table—but the cutting or not cutting through your fields, is not at my disposal. I can only represent the case to the directors and Company, and you will communicate with them. I am an engineer, and nothing else."

"Then I shall put the whole thing into the hands of our attorney, and resist to the death."

"To the death," said Miss Ann.

"You are against us, I see, young man. I was rather prepossessed——"

"Not so, I assure you! If I could do what you wish, I should be very happy."

"Sisters, I suppose it is useless longer to remain here," said Miss Margery, turning round, and walking away with great dignity, her large bonnet very high in the air.

"I should advise you to take it coolly, cousin,"

said Mr. Bat, accompanying her. "The young man has nothing to do with it."

"I will never give in, Cousin Bat," said Miss Margery. "That young man is evidently resolved to annoy us; so I shall have the law."

Miss Margery continued to talk loudly on the subject, until Lachlan interrupted her by saying—

"Oh! this is the very field. Ladies, if you wish to get rich, you will dig here for coal. I am much mistaken, if this rich earth doesn't cover a bed of plastic clay, underneath which is the brown earthy coal that exists in many parts of the county. I wish I had the working of it; and I wish, too, I had the irrigation of some other parts of your property. It would be worth double its present value."

Miss Margery stopped, and looked at Lachlan.

"Do you think we are going to become coal merchants, as well as railroad people?" she asked, indignantly.

"The very clay is a small fortune," said Lachlan. "What a rich county this is! And yet people don't seem to know it."

"Perhaps you would have us potters as well," said Miss Margery.

"Potters!" said Miss Ann.

"Let us hear what reasons you have for thinking this," said Mr. Bat.

Lachlan gave them a short geological lecture, that so charmed Miss Harriet, that she actually took his arm, and looked up into his face while he spoke. Even the other ladies nodded approvingly; and Miss Margery whispered to Cousin Bat—

"A young man of parts."

"Of parts!" echoed sister Ann.

"I say there's some sense in that!" cried Mr. Tunny. "The Royal Oak 's been dead and buried ever since the new line, and one wants anything as 'll stir us up a bit."

"Better dig it up again in coal," said Lachlan.

"What did you say of irrigation?" asked Miss Margery.

"That was in some land half a mile from here."

"Belonging to us?"

"So Mr. Tunny told me."

"Yes, ladies. In Pike's farm. That little bit o' ground as he says he can make nothing of."

"Suppose we go and see it," said Mr. Bat.

After some consultation, the whole party went to see the farm alluded to.

Again Lachlan lectured on draining and irrigation, so much to the satisfaction of his hearers, that he made great way into their better graces.

"I should like to give the young man a job," said Miss Daw. "This is work befitting country gentlefolks. Perhaps, while you are at the Royal Oak, Mr. Lachlan, you could give me an estimate of what it would cost to drain and irrigate this farm."

"With pleasure, ma'am," said Lachlan.

"Then I should thank you to do so. You have no objection, sisters?"

"No objection," said Miss Ann.

"I am so glad!" said Miss Harriet, who considered Lachlan's fortune as made.

By the time they returned to the Royal Oak, the afternoon was far advanced. Miss Daw ordered the carriage, and inquired for the Lieutenant. The latter had made good use of his time, and was still in the bar, drinking more than was altogether beneficial. The carriage appeared before he did, and the ostler said he was coming immediately. Mr. Bat and Lachlan helped the ladies into the carriage, and then the Lieutenant appeared.

"Deuced long you 've been aunts," he said,

as he swaggered out, and stumbled up to the box-seat, the groom giving him a helping push, and putting the reins and whip into his hands.

"He's drunk," said Lachlan to Mr. Bat. "It isn't safe."

"Hold your confounded impudence!" cried Bob, suddenly turning round, and giving Lachlan a very sharp cut with his whip.

The lash told doubly, and touched up one of the horses, as it was rebounding from Lachlan. Bob was going to give him a second cut, when the horse began to kick. He had evidently no management of the reins, and was pulling and whipping the horses at the same time. The ladies were greatly terrified, and not without reason.

Lachlan, infuriated by the indignity he had received, jumped up to the side of Bob, caught hold of the reins, and pitched him off the carriage, upon the grass that surrounded the Royal Oak, from which the inn derived its name.

"Go to the horses' heads!" said Lachlan to the ostler. "Give me the whip."

The first command was useless; the second Mr. Bat obeyed.

"Don't be alarmed, ladies," said Lachlan, giving the horses the rein.

They set off at full gallop—but Lachlan drew them in at last; and succeeded in quieting them by degrees. They were half way to Yeo, however, before they returned to their naturally sober state.

"You will excuse my taking this liberty," said Lachlan, as soon as he had the time to speak. "You would have been upset if that fellow had driven you."

Miss Margery and Miss Ann were rigidly firm, but very pale. Miss Harriet was in tears.

"We are very grateful to you, Mr. Lachlan. You have acted bravely."

"Bravely!" said Miss Ann.

"I'll leave him all my property," sobbed Miss Harriet, from behind.

Lachlan did not hear this blessed determination.

"Don't be a fool, sister Harriet," said Miss Daw. "But we'll strike Bob out of our will for ever."

"For ever!" said Miss Ann.

To the astonishment of all Yeo, Lachlan drove his charge triumphantly to the Rookery.

"You will walk in, Mr. Lachlan," said Miss Margery.

"No, thank you. I am going to inquire for Mr. William Eagles, and welcome home Mr. and Mrs. Bat."

At these inauspicious names, Miss Margery resumed her aristocratic rigidity. Lachlan did not know his own interest, or he would not have mentioned them.

"You will come and drink tea with us, as you promised?" said Miss Harriet.

"With pleasure. And I will call to-morrow about Pike's farm, and set to work at once. Good morning."

Lachlan was retreating with a bow, when Miss Margery advanced, and held out a very straight hand to him—a hand quite as inflexible as herself. Lachlan straightened his as much as he could, and took the offered fingers between his fingers and thumb.

"I can't say we shook hands," said Lachlan, afterwards, when recounting the leave-taking to Mr. Bat; "but I had the honour of touching my great aunt's fingers, for the first time; and very stiff they were. Miss Ann's were slightly more relaxed, and Miss Harriet's trembled so

that I couldn't hold them: but I did my best to be polite."

Scarcely had Lachlan taken his departure from the Rookery, when the coachman belonging to that abode, was seen to leave it on horseback, and to ride off in the direction of Yeo.

Mrs. Love and her daughter were in the street as he passed, and asked him where he was going, and what had become of Lieutenant Love.

"I be gwain to Yeominster, ma'am—Measter Bob be at the Royal Yoak," curtly replied the man, and rode on.

"There's something the matter, Margaret Anne," said Mrs. Love. "Why the carriage drove back a few minutes ago, and Robert was not driving it. We must go and see after aunts at once."

They did so, but "aunts" sent word to Mrs. Love that they were too tired to see her; and that alarmed lady went hither and thither making inquiries, until she learned that Mr. Lachlan Lyons had driven "aunts" home.

"We must not tell the Captain, Margaret Anne," she said. "That upstart has been doing

something insulting to Bob!—What can be the matter?"

Mrs. Love remained in a state of great trepidation, until her hopeful son returned, somewhat sobered, and gave his version of the story. This did not stop his mother's tremors, which were wrought into a sort of St. Vitus's dance, by her catching sight of Mr. Shark, the Yeominster attorney, riding up the village.

"He's going to aunts, Bob. I'm sure he's going to aunts! What have you done, my dear boy?" she said.

"I'll do more yet," growled Bob. "I'll do for that vulgar fellow, or I'll——"

We need not repeat what the Lieutenant said he would do.

Mr. Shark was on his road to the Rookery. He was seen to enter those sacred walls—he was seen to leave them again long after dark—but nothing ever transpired of the interview between him and the Misses Daw.

All that Mrs. Love could find out through the servants was, that they were sure Mrs. Margery had been writing, because they saw a new pen on the inkstand.

"Then she must have been altering her will,"

sighed Mrs. Love. "But I suppose it will be in favour of Margaret Anne and me, instead of Bob, though she may change her mind again a dozen times before she dies. She may leave everything to those old Bats and that Ellen Eagles, though I don't think she will. She doesn't like Ellen."

CHAPTER XVII.

ELLEN RECEIVES HER VISITORS.

LACHLAN went to the Nest. He saw Mr. Eagles, who, with a shake of his head, said William was no better. The doctors had forbidden him to move or speak, but he was so rebellious that it was impossible to keep him quiet.

Suddenly the church bells rang out a merry peal.

"They are come, then," said Mr. Eagles. "Mr. Bat doesn't mean to tell them of William's illness until to-morrow."

Scarcely were the words out of Mr. Eagles' mouth, than he was in the arms of his daughter.

"Ellen!"

"Father!"

"Why are you here, my treasure?"

"They could not deceive me, father. I knew

you would be the first to greet me if something were not amiss, and so I made Mr. Bat tell me all, and we came here first."

"No one notices me when Ellen is near," said Oliver.

"God bless you, my boy; welcome home," said Mr. Eagles. "All will be right now you are come. How well you look!"

"Of course I do. And Ellen, does she look twenty-five thousand miles older than she did? She has dragged me all round the world."

"Bless her dear face, no. It is as round and rosy again as it was. I scarcely know my own Ellen."

"I scarcely know my own self, father," said Ellen, looking at her husband.

So doing she saw Lachlan.

"Lachlan! This is a pleasant surprise," she said, greeting him with a smile and shake of the hand so bright and hearty, that Lachlan, too, scarcely knew the Ellen of former days.

Truly she was changed. Care had moved off from her forehead, and taken his frowns with him. Happiness filled his vacant seat. Anxiety had welled out of the depths of the dark eyes, and love had melted into the founts. Obstinate

determination had left the corners of the mouth, and smiling peace and joy had come in. Ellen Eagles was happy, and so Ellen Eagles was changed.

"May I go to William?" she asked.

"The doctors positively forbid his seeing you to-day," replied her father; "so you must go on to the Lodge, and not disappoint the Mr. Bats."

"We may go over the Downs," said Mr. Oliver, "and then our loyal slaves for the night will not think it necessary to break our necks by putting themselves in harness. Fancy all these rejoicings after two years of bondage. Ellen, how can you bear it?"

"She bears her yoke cheerfully," said the happy father, looking gratefully at his son-in-law.

"Then we will go home to-night, and Ellen shall come and nurse William to-morrow. My brothers looked as sulky as bears when Ellen, whom I always obey, persisted in coming here. Lachlan, you must come and dine with us."

But Lachlan positively declined.

After some little discussion, and an interview with Jenny, Mr. and Mrs. Oliver Bat again drove off. It was getting dusk as they drove

over the Downs, but their path was soon illuminated by the glare of a huge bonfire, which was shedding its light for miles round, in honour of the first married Bat and his bride.

They did not escape unrecognized. The tenders of the bonfire saw the carriage, and with hearty cheers welcomed them to the Downs. They would have taken the horses from the carriage, but the danger of the descent was represented, and they contented themselves with accompanying them to the Lodge. Here new cheers awaited them, and when Ellen got out of the carriage, and, amidst the vociferations of a tenantry somewhat the worse for strong cider, entered her home, and received a hearty kiss from her brothers-in-law, she felt all the pride and satisfaction that women usually feel on such occasions.

"We couldn't part with Oliver, my dear," said Mr. Bat, "so, as he told us to do just as we liked, we built a new wing to the house, where you can both retire when we two old bachelors are grumpy. This is your own especial drawing-room."

Ellen was conducted into a room that a few womanly touches would make perfect. The windows were open, and looked out upon a

garden, the bright flowers of which still shone in the twilight.

"You must come out one minute," said Mr. Bat, going through the open window.

Ellen followed.

"These terraces slope down to the Yeo, where you will be able to see Nick fishing, and it was he who built you this conservatory. Nol's library opens into the drawing-room, so, when you quarrel—"

"We never do, Mr. Bat, we never shall," said Ellen, whose bright eyes were glistening, like the flowers with dew.

"My Ellen!" said a voice behind her, as a hand was placed on her shoulder. "We shall be very happy. Thank you, brothers, for thinking of her."

"Why, we have thought of nothing else ever since you went away."

"Ellen, you will have a regular seraglio," said Mr. Oliver. "Three husbands at once."

"I am afraid she will soon tire of us," said Nicholas.

"Then you shall send me away as soon as I do," said Ellen, holding out her hand to her shy brother-in-law, who seldom spoke to a woman.

He grasped it with all his heart, and from that moment Ellen was mistress of his affections.

She occasionally had to yield her will to Mr. Bat senior—she frequently had amiable disputes with her lord and master, in which she invariably came off conquered—but Nicholas was her slave in all things.

"Don't make me jealous, Nick," said Mr. Oliver. "A woman seems a strange article of household furniture in these bachelorial halls, doesn't it?"

"I dare say she would like to take off her bonnet?" said the meek Nicholas.

"The moon has come out on purpose for us; never mind the bonnet," said Mr. Oliver. "Look how she makes a mirror of that bit of the brook by the Downs farm? You can see the roof. I almost fancy we can see Aline shimmering in the moonshine."

Mr. Bat had heard a confused story of Madam Rambully's broken leg, which he recounted to Ellen.

"Pshaw!" said Mr. Oliver; "what is the good of making us dismal this first night? We will be off to Italy again. I think you *had* better take off your bonnet, Ellen."

Everything that money could do was done to make Ellen's home comfortable. As she was escorted through the new wing to her room by the housekeeper, she expressed her astonishment at the thoughtfulness of her masters.

"Master Oliver is such a pet with his brothers, ma'am," said the housekeeper, "there's nothing they wouldn't do to please him."

Ellen saw that this good lady must be propitiated. It was "Master Oliver," and not his wife, that had been the object of thought. She was an interloper in the housekeeper's eyes.

There were shadows amidst the lights, even in her welcome home. Her brother ill, Madam Rambully and Aline unhappy, the housekeeper displeased; but the lights dispersed the shadows that evening.

We must not linger long at the Downs Lodge, because its inmates are comfortable, well-to-do people, and one of our heroines is made happy amongst them. Enough that on this particular day, and the few successive weeks, Ellen had to study to make herself agreeable to her household gods, and to receive visits from their friends.

The first time that the old Eagles' spirit showed itself was when the Loves and Daws

paid their devoirs to the bride and bridegroom. The eyebrows knitted, and the corners of the mouth stiffened, as she made a stately curtsey to them when they were announced. Happily, Mrs. Love's volubility and apparent cordiality covered the awkwardness of the meeting; but Ellen declared that she considered the visit an insult. The occasion was too propitious for Mr. Oliver to lose it.

"So glad to see you all together once more," he said, in his most caustic style. "The very last time we met was at a party at Mr. Raven's. I told you a pretty story, I remember. I suppose Miss Kern Lyons and Mary Raven let you know that my wife was the heroine."

"Unquestionably she did," said Miss Daw, unmoved.

"Unquestionably," echoed Miss Ann.

"I'm sure, Cousin Oliver," began Mrs. Love, while the Captain was making all kinds of grimaces at her, "we were very glad to have any unpleasantness—I mean gossip—I mean scandal, you know—no, not exactly, but I mean the sort of things you know, Mrs. Bat, that people will say,—in short we were delighted to hear that you—that it was cleared off, and that we,

you understand, such true old friends, and so much interested always."

"Exactly, Cousin Love," interrupted Mr. Oliver, "you were so glad to hear that Ellen had taken compassion on me, that you wrote me that kind note of congratulation!"

"Did I?" said Mrs. Love, who always took everything *au pied de la lettre;* "I forgot, but I'm very glad I'm sure if I did, and I wish you both joy, and so do aunts, and the Captain, and Margaret Anne, I'm sure. And if it were not that they say it is vulgar now to drink healths at wedding visits,—though every one drank ours, didn't they, Captain Love?—I should venture to drink yours now, Mrs. Bat and Cousin Oliver, and wish you joy, and advise my other cousins to follow your example. We met them both as we were driving down."

"I do beg to drink your healths, Mr. and Mrs. Oliver Bat," said Miss Daw.

"Mr. and Mrs. Oliver Bat," echoed Miss Ann.

Both the ladies bent their large bonnets at the same moment.

"I wish you happiness, Mr. and Mrs. Oliver," said Miss Harriet, meekly.

"Thank you for us both," said Mr. Oliver.

"I am sure your new family connection will be delighted to improve her old acquaintance with you all. You know, Ellen, we are all cousins in a rather remote degree."

Nobody ever knew whether Oliver Bat were in jest or earnest, but Ellen fixed her large eyes on Miss Harriet, and said she hoped further acquaintance might wipe off old prejudices.

"Very well put, very well put," said the Captain. "And I wish with all my heart anything on earth would wipe a woman's tongue clean, or stop it."

"Rather personal, Captain Love," said Miss Margery.

"Personal!" said Miss Ann.

"Now they're offended again," muttered Mrs. Love.

At this juncture Mr. Bat came in in farm attire.

"You must come and see Ellen's new garden," he said. "Nick and I laid it out, and we rather pride ourselves on our artistic arrangement of the beds and terraces."

"All this for that Ellen Eagles!" said Margaret Anne to Miss Daw, as the party went round the new garden.

"I could not have supposed she would have

made so aristocratic looking a Bat!" said Miss Daw, always just, if not generous.

"A Bat!" echoed Miss Ann.

"What are you saying about my unfortunate name?" said Mr. Oliver. "They made frightful work with it abroad. In France I was Monsieur Bât, which is, you know, a pack saddle; in Italy they softened us by an i, and we were Batti. I used to sing 'Batti, Batti,' to Ellen. The wits called us *Chauve-souris*, *Fledermaus*, and *Pipistrello*. The latter we thought such a pretty name, that Ellen was for coming home as Signor and Signora Pipistrello, instead of plain Bat."

Before the party went away Ellen's brow had relaxed, and a large nosegay of her best flowers was in Miss Harriet Daw's hand. Harriet had said, "Thank you, cousin," for the same, and her sisters did not reprove her on their way home.

"Ellen, you are a hypocrite," said Mr. Oliver. "You made up to your cousins after all."

"I did not, sir," said Ellen, indignantly.

"I say you did, ma'am. I saw them carry off roses, and verbenas, and mignonette, and red carnations—those symbols of devoted attachment that you used to give me."

"She is a good girl," said Mr. Bat, "and got

over her ill-temper. I like to be on good terms with all my relations, and Ellen will make you more tractable."

"I was anything but good," said Ellen. "I felt quite as bad as when I used to hate them all; but the evil spirit fled off in the flower-garden."

END OF VOL. II.

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